Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

31 July 2020

Dear Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the enquiry 'Issues facing diaspora communities in Australia.

In 2019, the African Australian Advocacy Centre (AAAC) was formed as a result of ongoing consultation with African communities from across Australia and it currently represents more than 15 African communities, including representatives from Botswana, Burundi, Congo DRC, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa, Egypt, Sudan, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zimbabwe. We are delighted to see that the number of AAAC members continues to grow.

The AAAC represents the interests of African Australian Communities by providing advocacy, research, and policy outcomes in collaboration with different stakeholders including but not limited to non- profit organisations, all three levels of government, business, industry, the civil sector, academia and the philanthropic sector.

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The Goals of AAAC are

- To see the African Australian community being recognised as an integral and valuable part of Australian society.
- To strengthen the social cohesion, equality, fairness and opportunities for members of African Australian Communities.
- To build inclusive communities, improve outcomes and create sustainable opportunities for African Australian communities.

The AAAC emphasizes and acknowledges the rich diversity of cultures of African Australian communities and the contributions they have made to Australia over the long history of arrival to Australia[1] .

Background to the AAAC submission

The AAAC's work in raising awareness of impact of COVID-19 and the seriousness that it presents to Australia and the world illustrates our commitment to the welfare of diaspora communities in Australia.

The AAAC is actively involved in social media awareness campaigns aimed at slowing the rate of COVID-19 infections curve. Specifically, we have provided health information and psychosocial assistance to AAAC members and other Africans in Australia and abroad via social media, including via the AAAC Facebook page, Twitter, WhatsApp and Zoom.[2]

In May 2020, the AAAC Executive Committee, Board Members and Advisors determined that it was appropriate to make a submission to this Senate enquiry.

To ensure the supply of accurate information in this submission the AAAC conducted an on-line national survey of AAAC members, partner organisations and non-aligned African Australian communities.[3]

The survey responses were provided anonymously and participants were informed in the survey's introduction that the results would form the basis of this submission.

The on-line survey was conducted from the beginning of June until the beginning of July. A total of 92 persons participated in the survey.

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[1] At least one person of African descent arrived on the first fleet

[2] https://www.facebook.com/africanaustralianac

[3] Survey question attached

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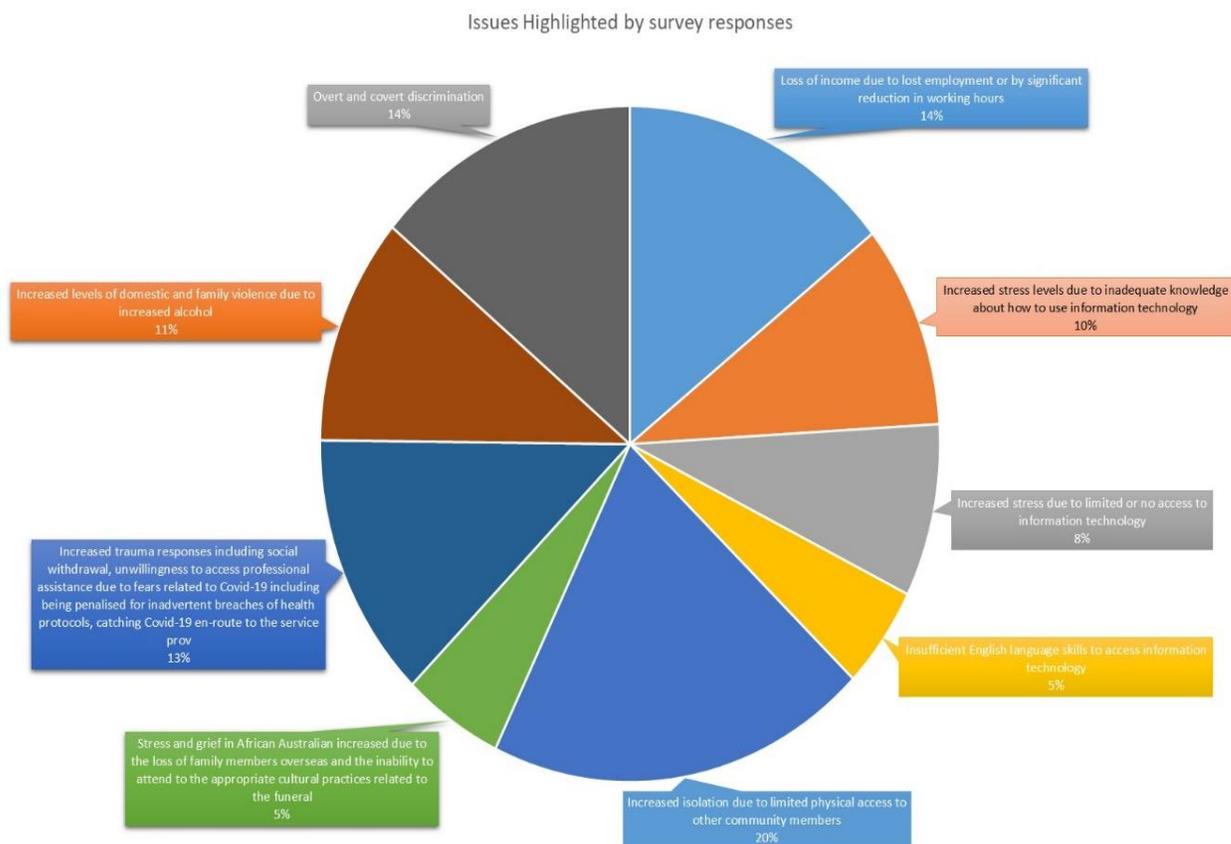
Summary of Survey findings

An analysis of the survey results reveals that the primary issues facing the African Australian diaspora are:

- Loss of income due to loss of employment or reduction of working hours.

- Increased levels of stress due to inadequate knowledge of information technology.

- Increased stress due to limited or no access to information technology.

- Insufficient language skills to access information technology.

- Increased isolation due to limited physical access to other community members.

- Stress and grief in African Australian communities, which was increased due to the loss of family members overseas and an inability to attend to the appropriate cultural practices related to funerals.

- Increased trauma responses including social withdrawal, Unwillingness to access professional assistance due to COVID- 19 related fears, including being financially penalised for inadvertent breaches of protocol and fears of catching COVID- 19 from the service providers or en-route.

- Adverse impact on education due to lack of information technology, internet access, computer hardware and face to face instruction. Many respondents indicated that on-line education was extremely difficult as they had not previously experienced it and had a strong preference for face to face instruction.

- Pressures imposed by limitations of living spaces. Respondents indicated that large families are common in their communities and finding a quiet place to study was extremely difficult and reduced their ability to spend appropriate time in education.

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- Increased levels of domestic and family violence due to confinement in close proximity to large numbers of people and significant increased alcohol consumption.

- Lack of parental education. Some respondents reported that a lack of parental education was hindering their ability to provide support to the children.

- Overt and covert discrimination. Respondents strongly reported deep concerns that they were increasingly subjected to both overt and covert discrimination within Australia.

Issues Highlighted by Survey responses

Issues Highlighted by survey responses

Loss of income due to lost employment or by significant reduction in working hours
14%

Increased stress levels due to inadequate knowledge about how to use information technology
10%

Increased stress due to limited or no access to information technology
8%

Insufficient English language skills to access information technology
5%

Increased isolation due to limited physical access to other community members
20%

Stress and grief in African Australian increased due to the loss of family members overseas and the inability to attend to the appropriate cultural practices related to the funeral
5%

Increased trauma responses including social withdrawal, unwillingness to access professional assistance due to fears related to Covid-19 including being penalised for inadvertent breaches of health protocols, catching Covid-19 en-route to the service prov
13%

Increased levels of domestic and family violence due to increased alcohol
11%

Overt and covert discrimination
14%

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The survey results highlighted issues related to COVID-19 that were unique to international students and non-permanent visa holders.

- International students and non-permanent visa holders of African descent indicated that their stress levels increased as a result of COVID-19 due to the lack of access to appropriate and timely information about visa extensions in the early stages of Co-vid 19 restrictions.

Overall Findings:

Overall, the majority of respondents reported that they generally felt safe and that the Australian government was trying as much help to them as they could under difficult circumstances.

However, despite this, respondents reported that overall, they did not feel they could fully participate in Australian society due to the existence of the barriers noted above.
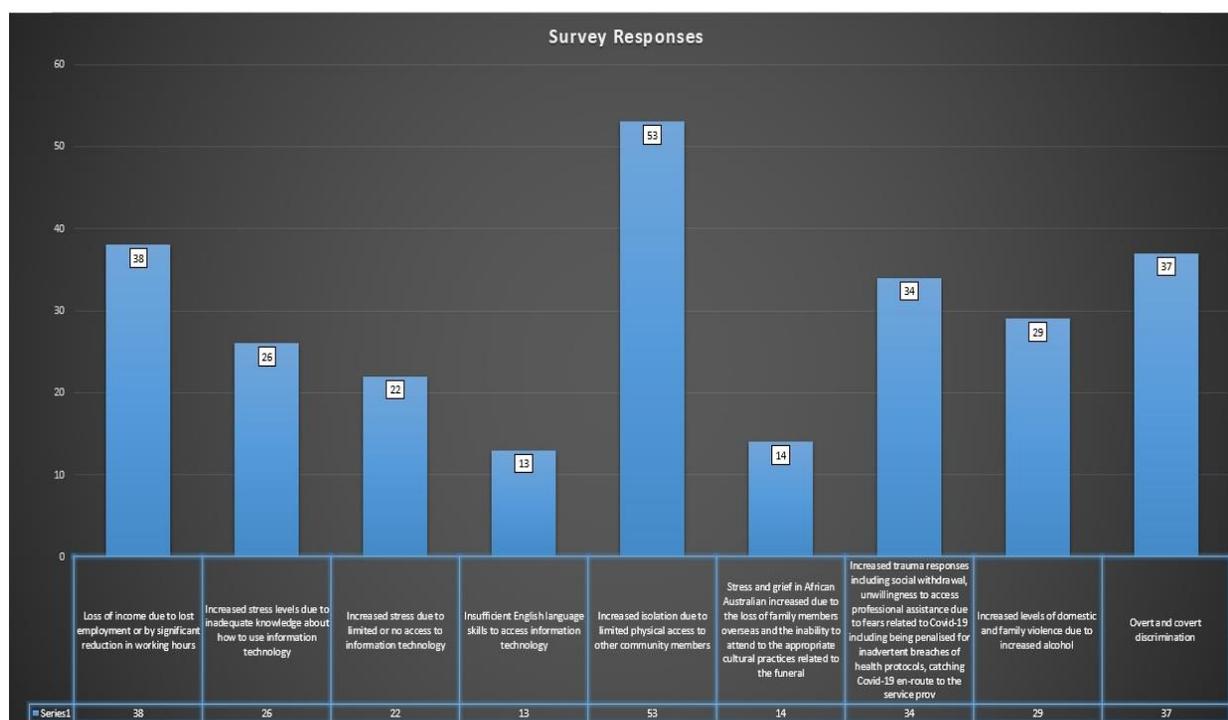
Respondents believe that to overcome these barriers and increase participation in Australian society:

- the elders in the African community need to be encouraged to get involved in public education and action strategies.

- the general population of Australia needs to have a better understanding of the various African cultures and languages that are represented within African Australian communities.

- African Australian communities must be increasingly engaged by all spheres of government and service providers to ensure that adequate and appropriate information is available to African Australians regarding social, legal and cultural practices in a new environment.

The survey highlighted that many African Australian communities especially the small emerging communities, feel that they are left behind in comparison to larger African and non-African Australian communities. African Australians would like appropriate and proportionate political and social representation by people who understand the diversity of African Australian communities and who can advocate to political and social institutions on behalf of African Australian communities.

The survey results also highlighted a disparity relating to access to information technology and IT Literacy across the African communities in Australia, particularly among the aged and more recently arrived members.

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Survey Responses

Survey Responses bar chart. Categories and values:

Category	Value
Loss of income due to lost employment or by significant reduction in working hours	38
Increased stress levels due to inadequate knowledge about how to use information technology	26
Increased stress due to limited or no access to information technology	22
Insufficient English language skills to access information technology	13
Increased isolation due to limited physical access to other community members	53
Stress and grief in African Australian increased due to the loss of family members overseas and the inability to attend to the appropriate cultural practices related to the funeral	14
Increased trauma responses including social withdrawal, unwillingness to access professional assistance due to fears related to Covid-19 including being penalised for inadvertent breaches of health protocols, catching Covid-19 en-route to the service prov	34
Increased levels of domestic and family violence due to increased alcohol	29
Overt and covert discrimination	37

Recommendations

On the basis of the survey results, the AAAC submits the following recommendations to this Senate enquiry:

1. African cultural diversity awareness training to be held for public servants, policy makers and decision makers, especially those coming into contact with Community from Africa.

2. The Government ensures its focus on "the economy" during and after the pandemic is focused on the impacts COVID-19 is having on vulnerable groups, especially casual workers, temporary visa holders and people with a disability.

3. The government implements paid pandemic leave to prevent quarantined or isolated workers from attending work if they are sick.

4. The government implements civics education broadly across Australian society in order to increase understanding of the diversity of Australian society and to encourage the participation of all citizens in civic activity.

5. Emerging communities be given priority access to small government grants to help them run some of their well-known annual activities and to sustain those activities into the future.

6. Continued financial, social and mental health support be provided to those affected by COVID-19.

7. The government consult communities, including the African Australian communities, before utilising the strict measures that were implemented in the shutdowns.

8. All political parties across Australia be encouraged to build closer bonds with the diverse communities from Africa and to cease seeing the communities from Africa living in Australia as either not Australian or second-class citizens.

9. The public service and government departments to increase the participation of people from Australian African communities in their workforces, so that they reflect their proportionate presence in the Australian population.

We thank the senate for the time taken to consider this submission. If further input into the submission is required, we can be contacted via aaadvocacycentreinfo@gmail.com

Yours sincerely

Noël Zihabamwe

Chairperson - African Australia Advocacy Centre Inc.

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Attachment 1 African Australian Advocacy Centre survey questions

- How has COVID-19 affected you and your community?
- Do you believe that the current means of support (e.g. financial grants, policies, etc.) that exist in Australia's political and social institutions have provided adequate support to your community? (If yes, please specify)
- Are you aware of any barriers to accessing government support or grants? (If yes, please specify below under "other")
- Do you feel as though members of your community participate fully in Australia's democratic and social institutions? (If yes, please specify below under "other")
- In which ways could Australia's political and social institutions better support you and your community?
- Do you have any additional feedback?

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