



# Multicultural and Multifaith Engagement Action Plan 2018–22.



Victorian Equal Opportunity  
& Human Rights Commission



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### Contact us

Enquiry Line 1300 292 153 or (03) 9032 3583  
Hearing impaired (TTY) 1300 289 621  
Interpreters 1300 152 494  
Email [enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au)  
Website [humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au](http://humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au)

Multicultural and Multifaith Engagement Action Plan 2018–22

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# Message from the Commissioner

Victoria's rich, cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths as a state.

Despite this, many individuals and communities from multifaith and multicultural backgrounds experience unfair treatment and racism because of their race, cultural identity or their religious beliefs and practices.<sup>1</sup>

While discrimination on the basis of race and religion is against the law in Victoria, every day at the Commission we hear experiences of people of all ages in many areas of public life who have been excluded, isolated or dismissed because of their background and beliefs. Our commitment is to prevent this discrimination in the first instance and to provide a form of redress to people when it happens.

Over the last 18 months we have been consulting deeply with Victoria's multicultural communities. While in many instances we have heard that there is a greater awareness of discrimination and a commitment to inclusion and diversity, we are also hearing of the local impact of increased tensions globally and nationally, the impact of stereotyped media reporting and the low level of awareness of the protections that do exist in our laws.

The result of these conversations and research is the Commission's Multicultural and Multifaith Engagement Action Plan (MMEAP). The strategies articulated in the plan in some cases build on our existing work with government, community leaders and organisations, and also are designed to develop new responses to racism and to empower multicultural and multifaith communities to access the Commission and make a complaint.

We are also committed to increasing understanding within the broader Victorian community of the harm caused by racism and of the need to stand up to racism. Our three objectives are:



1. deepening our partnerships and engagement with multicultural and multifaith organisations
2. empowering multicultural and multifaith individuals to understand and exercise their rights
3. using digital strategies to encourage increased reporting of racism in our community.

We look forward to continuing to work to improve the lives of all Victorians and ensure everyone can participate equally in our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristen Hilton'.

Kristen Hilton,  
Victorian Equal Opportunity  
and Human Rights Commissioner

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<sup>1</sup> There is an evidence base of statistically significant levels of racism and religious discrimination among multifaith and multicultural communities in Victoria. See, for example, 'Racism in Victoria and what it means for the health of Victorians', Department of Health and Human Services, 2017.

# How we developed the MMEAP

Throughout 2017 and early 2018, the Commission conducted an extensive consultation process with multicultural and multifaith community leaders and members, and key community agencies and advocates. Their considered thoughts and insight informed the development of the MMEAP, and they are acknowledged in a separate section.

For the purposes of the MMEAP, 'multicultural' refers to the groups and communities in Australia that are ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse, and observe different cultural beliefs and practices. The term 'multifaith' recognises the diverse religious beliefs, practices and activities observed by multicultural groups.

There are a number of targeted, visible communities experiencing ongoing racism and vilification in Victoria. In particular, the Commission noted the significant impact on minority communities. A representative from an Islamic community organisation noted:

**“When someone on a bus comes out with a racist tirade against a woman in a hijab and nobody says a word, that woman doesn't just disconnect from the racist individual, she disconnects from Australia.”<sup>2</sup>**

The Commission's stakeholder consultations have confirmed the silencing effect of racism on communities and the undermining of their confidence and self-worth. Representatives from peak community organisations have suggested that racism leaves their members isolated and unable to participate fully in all areas of public life. Muslim community members, for example, have told us about not wanting to go out of their house after national or international terrorism related events for fear of being targeted. African community members have told of being fearful of targeting by authorities when in public places.

In addition to consultation with peak multicultural and multifaith representatives, leaders and members, the Commission conducted desktop research, established an internal MMEAP reference group and an external stakeholder peer review to inform the development, implementation and evaluation of the MMEAP.

Through its work in developing the MMEAP, the Commission acknowledges the complexities of compounded barriers and intersectional discrimination within multicultural and multifaith communities. In addition, we recognise that there are cross-generational issues, and differing cultural, religious and heritage values within each of the communities. That is, there is 'diversity within diversity'.

## Objectives

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The policy context, consultation process, remit and strategic direction of the Commission informs the objectives of the MMEAP.

The MMEAP has three objectives. The objectives are not exclusive but rather build on each other's achievements to provide a comprehensive suite of actions focused on effective multicultural and multifaith engagement.

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<sup>2</sup> Feedback received from consultation held by the Commission on 31 May 2017.



A Commission staff member sharing information at the City of Whittlesea's Welcome Expo for newly arrived communities in 2017.

The objectives of the MMEAP are:

### **1. Deepening our partnerships and engagement with multicultural and multifaith organisations**

The Commission seeks to engage with decision makers such as peak bodies, cross-sector agencies and community associations to reduce racism incurred by multicultural and multifaith communities across Victoria. By collaborating, consulting and contributing on specific interventions to address racism, the Commission pursues a greater understanding within the wider community on the impact and harm of racial and religious discrimination and vilification to targeted communities.

### **2. Empowering multicultural and multifaith individuals to understand and exercise their rights**

The Commission will deepen its engagement with vulnerable communities to develop co-designed community education and project initiatives that build a greater awareness of people's rights under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*, the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Through compelling storytelling, the Commission supports individuals to assert their rights and to access its services.

### **3. Adopting digital strategies to encourage increased reporting of racism**

The Commission seeks to draw on its partnerships with communities to develop human-centred digital strategies and campaigns that will increase awareness across the Victorian community of the harm of racism and vilification and motivate individuals to report racist incidents and access the Commission's dispute resolution service. This will enable the Commission to contribute to wider research and understanding of the compounding complexities of racism, provide strategies to reduce its impact, and strengthen our own evidence base to enable us to do this.

Over the next four years, the Commission will commit to these objectives by delivering on the actions specified in the MMEAP.

## **EVALUATING OUR IMPACT**

The Commission will seek to continuously improve our engagement with multicultural and multifaith communities. Being informed and responsive to the changing and dynamic community work within the multicultural and multifaith sectors will ensure that the MMEAP is a living document. We are committed to monitoring the progress we are making to achieve our objectives and to evaluating our performance in delivering our work and the impact it is having.

# Objectives

## Objective 1: Deepening our partnerships and engagement with multicultural and multifaith organisations

### Outcome 1

Increased initiatives to protect targeted, minority or vulnerable multicultural and multifaith communities

#### Action

- Participate in the work of the National Anti-Racism Strategy implemented by the Australian Human Rights Commission
- Contribute to consultations and initiatives connected with the implementation phase of the Victorian African Communities Action Plan 2018-2028
- Partner with Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion (MASC), Department of Premier and Cabinet, on the proposed anti-racism initiative
- Engage with agencies working closely with communities experiencing intersectional discrimination, including Action on Disability within Ethnic Communities (ADEC), local government and community legal centres

#### Measure

- Increase in projects or engagement with communities about rights and remedies under our laws

### Outcome 2

Communities vulnerable to racism in specific geographic areas have a greater understanding of their rights and access to complaint pathways

#### Action

- Participate or present in annual conferences addressing multicultural and multifaith issues such as the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) Conference
- Attend the Migrant Workers Group Steering Committee (a consortium of Victorian organisations)
- Engage with local government peak associations and networks, such as the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Victorian Local Government Multicultural Issues Network (VLGMIN)
- Partner in dialogue forums with community agencies and leaders from specific multicultural and multifaith communities who have experienced racism

#### Measure

- The Commission's position on racism is noted, acknowledged or adopted in the work of organisations advocating for policy action or law reform
- The Commission is viewed as a partner and collaborator by peak organisations addressing equal opportunity and racism issues
- A measurable increase in engagement with multicultural and multifaith organisations and the communities they represent

## Objective 2: Empowering multicultural and multifaith individuals to understand and exercise their rights

### Outcome 1

Tailored and interactive events and education sessions that empower individuals and groups who have experienced racism

#### Action

- Participate in significant calendar events for multicultural and multifaith communities who have been targeted by racism
- Co-deliver with community partners, co-designed education sessions for:
  - multicultural and multifaith communities experiencing persistent, harmful racism, discrimination or vilification
  - a certain subset of these communities experiencing intersectional discrimination such as LGBTI, disability, women, or carers

#### Measure

- A measurable increase in the delivery of education and information sessions for multicultural and multifaith communities
- A measurable increase in attendance of community members at these education sessions
- An increase in members from African, Muslim, Aboriginal, and other minority, targeted communities accessing the Commission's enquiries and complaints services
- Pre and post surveys show a significant increase in awareness of rights and knowledge of support services

### Outcome 2

Deeper engagement with vulnerable communities in targeted geographic areas to address racism

#### Action

- Partner on the We Stand Together project based in the City of Yarra, with a particular focus on the provision of training for community facilitators, co-delivery of community education sessions, and contribution to co-created resources for communities

#### Measure

- One training session to 14 community facilitators
- One community forum to 140 community members
- Creation and dissemination of over 1000 printed information resources with key messages about racism and referral pathways
- Co-author evaluation report
- Increase in community members experiencing racism from City of Yarra municipality accessing the Commission's enquiries and complaints services

### Outcome 3

**Accessible resource in relevant format, language and design supporting communities to understand their rights and to access the Commission's services**

#### Action

- Collaborate on the content and design of a resource (print or digital) with a multicultural and multifaith focus group using a human-centred approach
- Co-ordinate a community event to launch the resource

#### Measure

- Over 500 resources are distributed to multicultural and multifaith communities and agencies
- An increase in downloads to the Commission's website of digital content for multicultural and multifaith communities
- A measurable increase in communities that speak these languages accessing the Commission's enquiries and complaints services

### Outcome 4

**Community 'ambassadors' are empowered to inform their communities about their rights, responsibilities and remedies under our laws, and the Commission's services**

#### Action

- Partner with key agencies that work closely with communities experiencing racism to deliver training to multicultural and multifaith leaders and representatives such as the Nelson Mandela Day Commemorative Committee Inc.
- Collaborate with Adult Migrant Education Providers (AMEP) such as Melbourne Polytechnic, to provide education sessions to English as an Additional Language (EAL) students and AMEP teachers

#### Measure

- A minimum of four training sessions are delivered on an annual basis
- Positive feedback is received from partnering agencies

### Outcome 5

**Our knowledge is shared to address racism through statutory reform or policy change**

#### Action

- Contribute to law reform or review associated with racism, religious belief or activity discrimination, or racial and religious vilification, including reform of the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act
- Sit on advisory boards and working groups to review or create policy to address systemic discrimination that impacts multicultural and multifaith communities

#### Measure

- Establishing an agreed position on how the law ought to be reformed to protect rights
- Publish submissions and research to proposed law reform or policy change associated with racism or religious discrimination or vilification

## Objective 3: Adopting digital strategies to encourage increased reporting of racism

### Outcome 1

Increased understanding of the barriers and solutions to reporting racism

#### Action

- Identify barriers to reporting racism, discrimination and vilification among a focus group of multicultural and multifaith
- Consult and collaborate with communities and agencies experiencing significant increases in racism, particularly African and Muslim communities

#### Measure

- Workshop and summary report prepared and presented to branches across the Commission. Workshop insights on barriers to reporting inform
- Communications and engagement approach to working with communities experiencing increased racism.

### Outcome 2

An evidence-based digital campaign that deploys messages or narratives that address these barriers to reporting racism, discrimination and vilification

#### Action

- Develop various prototypes and iterations of online and social media digital engagement
- Test impact of prototypes and iterations of messages and narratives
- Gather insights about what messages or narratives work
- Refine the campaign based on insights

#### Measure

- Reach, engagement and website clicks generated by the digital campaign
- A measurable increase in the number of enquiries and complaints received from the communities the campaign addresses

- A measurable increase in the number of contact or reports received from individuals of racist incidents as a result of the campaign

### Outcome 3

Increased community awareness of individual experiences of racism and increased reporting of racist incidents to the Commission

#### Action

- Co-create with a focus group of multicultural and multifaith individuals
- Collect and document a suite of case studies
- Draft, review and develop stories
- Integrate digital storytelling into the Commission's website

#### Measure

- A measurable increase in contact to the Commission by individuals experiencing racism or witnessing racism
- A measurable number of stories of real people has been shared to increase awareness.

### Outcome 4

The Commission's data on racism is strengthened to contribute to state and nation-wide racism evidence base

#### Action

- Share statistics and data that reflect current issues relating to discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and vilification in multicultural and multifaith communities

#### Measure

- A measurable increase in data and statistics that reflect the information about racism received from multicultural and multifaith leaders and representatives.



Staff and participants at the WestJustice Employment Law Trainer Program held at the Commission.

## Our Strategic Plan

The Commission's **Strategic Plan: Upholding Human Rights Close to Home 2017–22** has four strategic priorities:

- Embedding a Human Rights Culture
- Improving Workplace Equality
- Protecting Human Rights in Closed Environments
- Reducing Racism.

Our Strategic Plan states that:

The mental and physical health impacts of racism on people from minority communities are well documented. It can leave people feeling isolated and vulnerable and has a silencing effect on individuals and communities, having an impact on participation in all areas of public life. Racism also has a negative impact on productivity and community cohesion in society more broadly.

Within the Reducing Racism priority area, there are four overarching initiatives that underpin this work:

- engage with people from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds to build a greater awareness of rights
- work with the public, private and community sectors on specific interventions aimed at reducing racism in our community

- co-design digital strategies with particular communities to encourage increased reporting of racism
- partner with stakeholders to promote positive representations of Aboriginal culture and cultural rights.

And these initiatives are connected to the Strategic Plan's outcomes for Reducing Racism:

- a greater understanding within our community of the impact and harm caused by racism
- people experiencing racism are better able to assert their rights
- communities and key institutions adopting strategies to stand up to racism.

Our strategic direction compels us to engage with multicultural and multifaith communities in Victoria, with an emphasis on those communities experiencing compounded vulnerabilities, barriers and harm. In developing the MMEAP, we have committed to actions that through consultation, collaboration and co-design, we believe will contribute to achieving the outcomes in our Strategic Plan to reduce racism.

# About the Commission

The Commission is an independent statutory body with responsibilities under Victoria's key human rights laws: the *Equal Opportunity Act*, the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act* and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. These laws are designed to advance cultural diversity and social cohesion in our community by eliminating discrimination, realising equality and promoting human rights.

The Commission's role under these laws is to protect and promote human rights in Victoria. We do this through a range of functions, which include:

## RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

We resolve complaints of discrimination, sexual harassment, victimisation and racial and religious vilification by providing a free and confidential dispute resolution process.

## RESEARCH

We undertake research to understand and find solutions to systemic causes of discrimination and human rights breaches.

## EDUCATE

We provide information to help people understand and assert their rights. We conduct reviews of programs and practices to help organisations comply with their equal opportunity and human rights obligations. We provide an education and consultancy service to government, business and the community to drive leading practice in equality, diversity and human rights, including a collaborative approach to developing equal opportunity action plans.

## ADVOCATE

We raise awareness across all parts of the community about the importance of equality and human rights, encouraging meaningful debate, leading public discussion and challenging discriminatory views and behaviours.

## MONITOR

We monitor the operation of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities and track Victoria's progress in protecting fundamental rights.

## ENFORCE

We intervene in court proceedings to bring an expert independent perspective to cases raising equal opportunity and human rights issues.

Our vision is for a fair, safe and inclusive Victoria where every person is respected and treated with dignity.

Our mission is to engage and influence law and policy makers, institutions, communities and individuals to protect and promote human rights in Victoria.

Our values are, that in everything we do, we embrace Creativity, Accountability, Rigour and Empathy (CARE). These values describe the way we act with our colleagues, our partners and the people and communities that we work with.

Our vision, mission and values inform our approach with the MMEAP.

# Further information

## Monitoring and reporting

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Responsibility for delivering actions under the MMEAP is shared across the Commission. All staff, the Commissioner and the Board have a role to play. To make sure we are on track and delivering on our commitments, a MMEAP Reference Group comprised of representatives from all the Commission's Branches will monitor progress against the actions in the MMEAP.

Senior Management is responsible for project management and coordination of actions under the MMEAP. The Commissioner will report on progress of the MMEAP to the Board every six months.

## Community consultations

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The Commission is very grateful for the excellent input from a great many multicultural and multifaith organisations, and community agencies that were consulted at the scoping, research and planning stages of the MMEAP.

In particular, the Commission thanks Maria Dimopoulos and the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) for their insight and partnership.

The following is a list of organisations that contributed to the main consultation phase in 2017, which is not an exhaustive list as so many organisations and community members gave invaluable input throughout the consultation phase for the MMEAP.

- Centre for Multicultural Youth
- Jewish Community Council of Victoria
- Australian Vietnamese Women's Association
- Islamic Council of Victoria
- Islamic Shia Council of Victoria
- SPECTRUM Migrant Resource Centre
- Refugee Legal
- Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services
- Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights
- United Pacific Council of Victoria
- African Think Tank
- VMC, Regional Advisory Councils (RAC) – across Victoria
- African Leadership of Victoria
- Key agencies based in Shepparton, Morwell and Hoppers Crossing



The Commission in partnership with nine organisations of the Stand Together collective, working to address racial attacks on targeted minorities within the City of Yarra municipality.

## Further enquiries about this Action Plan

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The Commission welcomes your feedback on the MMEAP and our performance against it. If you would like information about the MMEAP, please contact our Enquiry Line on 1300 292 153, or by email to: [enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@veohrc.vic.gov.au).



# Contact us

Enquiry Line	1300 292 153 or (03) 9032 3583
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