The Australian Community

The Australian Multicultural Council’s report on multiculturalism and social cohesion in Australian neighbourhoods

December 2013
Executive summary

Australian democracy, multiculturalism and social cohesion

Multiculturalism is a key feature of Australia as a modern liberal democracy. Australian multiculturalism entails actively supporting and maintaining diversity, an equal emphasis on rights and responsibilities, and a focus on democratic values of participation, inclusion, fairness, and justice. There are no special entitlements afforded under our current multicultural policy.

All Australians have the same basic rights to practice and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language within the law and free from discrimination. In turn all Australians are expected to be loyal to Australia, obey its laws, and to become self-reliant citizens who contribute to the social and economic life of our nation.

Compared with the widespread incidence of unrest that has characterised many countries around the world, Australian society has remained peaceful, harmonious and remarkably resilient. This broadly positive picture is supported by both national and international research. The latest research from the Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion* series states that 84 per cent of Australians support multiculturalism, and social cohesion is strong at the national level. Yet indicators at the community level, particularly in neighbourhoods of high cultural diversity and low socioeconomic status, are significantly below the national average. This is reflected in: lower levels of trust, sense of safety, political participation, involvement in volunteer work, and higher levels of discrimination. Pockets of social and economic disadvantage, especially when tied to low levels of social cohesion, can have long term implications for productivity, prosperity and community harmony.

The opportunity therefore exists for a more targeted focus on neighbourhoods and groups which experience lower levels of social cohesion, with attendant strategies to build trust, civic engagement, community resilience and a positive culture of hope, reward and opportunity.
The need for a multicultural and social cohesion strategy and framework

In 2013, the Council undertook a series of community visits across Australia to understand social cohesion efforts at the local level. The Council also received briefings from key academics, commissioned a survey of the People of Australia Ambassador network, held preliminary discussions multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, and drew from its experience and ongoing involvement in key areas of public policy.

Australian government and non-government stakeholders have undertaken much activity in the area of social cohesion. We witnessed many effective place-based programs advancing a broad social cohesion strategy at a grassroots level. These programs and the community organisations that deliver them are funded from a range of sources, including all levels of government as well as community, business and philanthropic enterprises. As the case studies in this report indicate, there are a number of effective local cohesion initiatives. Equally however, some local areas seem to lack effective approaches to social cohesion, and funding remains ad hoc.

Missing is a broader strategy and the strategic partnerships required to deliver such a strategy. Social cohesion currently lacks a clear and integrated policy framework. This is a significant gap given the array of government and community funded programs that aim to foster social cohesion at a national, state and local level. As a result, social cohesion efforts in Australia could be described as program rich; policy and coordination poor. An effective multicultural social cohesion framework requires genuine whole-of-government and whole of community input and engagement, mechanisms to support effective government and community partnerships, and strategies to enhance local leadership and coordination.

Guiding principles

The Council has identified the following principles to guide ongoing work on social cohesion:

- Multiculturalism and social cohesion should be about all Australians for all Australians.
- A holistic view of social cohesion should consider and incorporate not only cultural and linguistic diversity, but also other types of diversity within our communities.
- Any Australian definition of multiculturalism or social cohesion must recognise our country’s First Peoples and the ongoing importance of reconciliation.
Key priority areas

The Council has identified supporting **productive diversity** through education and employment; fostering **interfaith dialogue**; and targeting **youth, women and new arrivals** in social cohesion efforts as key priorities into the future.

Case studies

Case studies from the Council’s community visits illustrate success stories at the local level and highlight opportunities for developing social cohesion. The case studies vary in geographic location, demographic size and the size of the migrant population. The first case study demonstrates the role of **supportive local government** in building and maintaining social cohesion. The second case study highlights the importance of productive partnerships in developing **productive diversity**. The third case study shows the benefit of **community engagement** through community coordination, positive leadership, and mentoring. The last case study illustrates the success of **youth leadership strategies** in school education.

Future opportunities

The Council identifies the following opportunities to strengthen social cohesion in Australian communities:

1. **Supporting community capabilities**
   Strengthen and empower community capital, local coordination, partnerships and leadership; develop community engagement and protocols for rapid and coordinated action; foster youth mentoring and engagement

2. **Developing community structures**
   Develop and implement a National Partnership and Strategy for Social Cohesion and a National Social Cohesion Framework; develop a more strategic approach to research and evaluation; develop a more streamlined, coordinated and sustainable approach to funding.

3. **Fostering belonging and trust**
   Better target social cohesion efforts towards at-risk communities and groups such as youth, women and new arrivals; develop a more strategic approach to intercultural and interfaith contact and dialogue; support shared spaces and communities of practice.
A way forward for multiculturalism and social cohesion in Australia

Australia has strong foundations as a multicultural, socially cohesive nation. The Council believes that concerted effort is required to maintain these foundations, to ensure that stresses do not translate into cracks that would risk the ongoing success of multicultural Australia. While Australia is a remarkably cohesive country, it is not immune to instances of social unrest and tension. This points to the importance of pro-active approaches to fostering community cohesion and underscores the need for effective capacity to address community tensions if and when they arise.

In 2013, the Council undertook a series of community visits across Australia to observe and understand social cohesion efforts at the local level. Council members consulted with stakeholders such as community groups and organisations, local government and police, schools, and migrant resource centres in 13 local jurisdictions across metropolitan and rural locations in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

The Council also received briefings from key academics, commissioned a survey of the People of Australia Ambassador network and held preliminary discussions with multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. In addition, the Council drew from its experience and ongoing involvement in key areas of public policy, including Australia’s multicultural policy, the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy, the People of Australia Ambassadors Program, the Access and Equity Inquiry and the establishment and implementation of strengthened Multicultural Access and Equity arrangements.

What the Council found is that Australian government and non-government stakeholders have undertaken much activity in the area of social cohesion. In many of the communities council members visited we met highly energised, motivated and capable people working together to address local issues. These people often act as the backbone for social cohesion efforts in their local neighbourhoods. Council members also witnessed a host of effective place-based programs that seek to advance aspects of what might be described as a broad social cohesion strategy at a grassroots level. These programs and the community organisations that deliver them are funded from a range of sources, including all levels of government as well as community, business and philanthropic enterprises.

As the case studies in this report indicate, there are a number of effective local cohesion initiatives. Equally however, some local areas seem to lack effective approaches to social cohesion, and funding remains ad hoc. Missing is a broader strategy and the strategic partnerships required to deliver such a strategy. Social cohesion currently lacks a clear and integrated policy framework. As a result, social cohesion efforts in Australia could be described as program rich, but policy and coordination poor.
This is a significant gap given the array of government and community funded programs that aim to foster social cohesion, often in the same locations. Co-location of key social policies and programs within the Department of Social Services will enable policies, frameworks and governance processes to support coordinated action at a whole-of-government and whole of community level.

**Guiding principles**

An effective multicultural social cohesion framework requires genuine whole-of-government and whole of community input and engagement, mechanisms to support effective government and community partnerships, and strategies to enhance local leadership and coordination. Priorities should be informed by robust evidence, resources targeted to communities most in need and outcomes evaluated against international, national and local benchmarks.

The Council has identified the following principles to help guide and inform ongoing work on social cohesion:

- Multiculturalism and social cohesion should be about all Australians for all Australians.
- A holistic view of social cohesion should consider and incorporate not only cultural and linguistic diversity, but also other types of diversity within our communities.
- Any Australian definition of multiculturalism or social cohesion must recognise our country’s First Peoples and the ongoing importance of reconciliation.

**Key priority areas**

The Council has identified supporting productive diversity through education and employment; fostering interfaith dialogue; and targeting youth, women and new arrivals in social cohesion efforts as key priorities. These key priority areas are highlighted throughout the report in the themes, case studies and opportunities.

**Structure of the report**

Chapter one tells the story of a strong Australian democracy where a diverse society is supported through a robust multicultural policy. It highlights research into social cohesion in Australia, examines how Australia is faring, and suggests a way forward. Chapter two presents case studies of the successes and challenges of social cohesion at the local level. Chapter three outlines opportunities to strengthen the lived experience of multiculturalism and social cohesion into the future.
Chapter 1
Democracy, multiculturalism and social cohesion in Australia

This chapter tells the story of a strong Australian democracy where a diverse society is supported through a robust multicultural policy. It highlights research into social cohesion in Australia, examines how Australia is faring according to national and international benchmarks, and suggests a way forward.

Diverse Australia

Cultural, linguistic and religious diversity is both a fact and an enduring feature of Australia’s social landscape. This diversity benefits all Australians and is critical to understanding our past, present and future. Strengthening our diverse national social fabric makes economic and social sense for Australia’s future.

Our nation’s rich diversity began with Australia’s First Peoples. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were and continue to be diverse in terms of geographical location, language groupings, kinship, and ties to the land. Following the arrival of the first Anglo-Celtic settlers from Britain and Ireland, Australia’s diversity has continued to increase. Since 1945, more than 7.2 million people have migrated to Australia, including approximately 800 000 humanitarian migrants. Post World War II immigration has given Australia recent global status as a key country for immigration and a leading multicultural nation. Immigrants have come from diverse parts of the world with distinctive and successive waves from Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Recently, Australia’s demographics have shifted with the proportion of the overseas-born population originating from Europe declining from 52 per cent in 2001 to 40 per cent in 2011 and the proportion of migrants born in Asia increasing from 24 per cent of the overseas-born population in 2011 to 33 per cent in 2011. The largest increasing groups between 2001 and 2011 came from India and China. The overseas-born population from countries outside Europe and Asia has also increased.

Australia’s resident population of 23 million now includes around 5.3 million people born overseas. Australians identify with around 300 ancestries and languages, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The most recent Census figures show that 47 per cent of Australians were born overseas or have overseas-born parents.

1 Department of Immigration and Border Protection Fact Sheet: Australia’s Cultural Diversity 2013
2 http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013 (Country of Birth)
5 Access and Equity Inquiry Report 2012, p2
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has also increased by 20.5 per cent since the 2006 Census, constituting around three per cent of the Australian population.

Eight of the top ten countries of birth of Australia’s overseas born population are countries where the official language is not English. Almost four million people speak a language other than English at home, indicating increasing linguistic diversity. Religious diversity is also increasing. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of people identifying with a non-Christian faith grew significantly, making up 7.2 per cent of the total population in 2011 compared with 4.9 per cent in 2001.

In addition to being part of the everyday reality of Australian life, diversity brings economic and social benefits for all Australians. Our nation’s diversity also increases our global connectedness, fosters innovation and opens up new trade and investment opportunities. With an ageing population and an increasingly globalised economy, our diversity will remain a key asset into the future.

Democracy and multiculturalism in Australia

Australia has a thriving liberal democracy which supports and underpins our strong brand of multiculturalism. Our successful multicultural society and our democracy are results of a strong commitment to the democratic principles of participation, inclusion, fairness and justice. Newcomers are given the opportunity to support these shared values through the citizenship model, whereby commitments can be made to our shared civic values, and to our shared experience of democracy.

Rights and responsibilities are the cornerstones of being Australian. There are no special entitlements afforded under our current multicultural policy. All Australians have the same basic rights to practice and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language within the law and free from discrimination. In turn all Australians are expected to be loyal to Australia, obey its laws, and to become self-reliant citizens who contribute to the economic and social life of our nation.

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7 https://theconversation.com/australian-census-indigenous-australia-improves-but-closing-the-gap-is-a-long-way-off-7678
9 Department of Immigration and Border Protection 2013. Fact Sheet: Australia’s Cultural Diversity
A multicultural Australia does not simply mean a diverse Australia: it means a productively diverse Australia where multiculturalism is seen as in our national interest, a contribution to our prosperity and to our strength. It is the lived experience and daily reality of living in Australia.

The principles of our multicultural policy provide a strong definition of Australian multiculturalism:

**Principle 1:** The Australian Government celebrates and values the benefits of cultural diversity for all Australians, within the broader aims of national unity, community harmony and maintenance of our democratic values.

**Principle 2:** 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.

**Principle 3:** The Australian Government welcomes the economic, trade and investment benefits which arise from our successful multicultural nation.

**Principle 4:** The Australian Government will act to promote understanding and acceptance while responding to expressions of intolerance and discrimination with strength, and where necessary, with the force of law.

### Social cohesion research in Australia

Social cohesion in Australia cannot be defined or measured separately from multiculturalism. Indeed, the two are intimately connected in an Australian context. Managing Australia’s diversity effectively is the main challenge to fostering and maintaining social cohesion into the future, as Australian society becomes increasingly diverse and stays firmly committed to multiculturalism.

One of the strongest definitions of social cohesion in Australia comes from the Scanlon Foundation’s *Mapping Social Cohesion* series. A key component of these surveys is the *Scanlon-Monash Index of Social Cohesion*, which measures social cohesion according to five key domains:

- **Belonging:** Shared values, identification to Australia, trust.
- **Social justice and equity:** Evaluation of national policies.

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11 The *Mapping Social Cohesion* series provides detailed surveys on social cohesion, immigration and population issues. They include a national survey conducted annually and locality surveys every three years. In doing so, they provide a strong basis for measuring and tracking community attitudes on important social issues over time.
• **Participation**: Voluntary work, political and cooperative involvement.
• **Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy**: Experience of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers.
• **Worth**: Life satisfaction and happiness, future expectations.

These dimensions provide a definition which is both important and useful. It is a broad definition which is applicable both to multiculturalism and social cohesion, and provides us with the tools to measure community attitudes to social issues.

The *Mapping Social Cohesion* surveys provide a means to measure community attitudes across three dimensions: at the national level, within selected localities and within sub-groups of the population. The *Scanlon-Monash Index* has the added benefit of providing longitudinal data that enables comparisons of community attitudes over time.

The Council is struck by the potential offered by the Neighbourhood Surveys, which are administered every three years in suburbs selected for their cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. These surveys explore attitudes at the community level, where people of different backgrounds and cultures live their lives. The Council is of the view that such locality surveys may provide a powerful basis to inform and target efforts to foster greater social cohesion at a community level. To test this view and following the recommendation of the Council, the then Department of Immigration and Citizenship commissioned Professor Andrew Markus from Monash University to undertake additional locality surveys on a one-off basis in five new locations with contrasting patterns of exposure to immigration. These new locations are: Mirrabooka, Western Australia; Murray Bridge, South Australia; Logan and the Atherton Tablelands area Queensland; and Shepparton, Victoria. Results from this survey work will be available in early 2014 and published as part of the Scanlon Foundation survey series.

The recently published *Research into the Current and Emerging Drivers of Social Cohesion, Social Division and Conflict in Multicultural Australia* uses similar indicators\(^{12}\) to measure social cohesion but takes a more qualitative approach. This report was prepared for the *Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee* and is a positive example of a cooperative approach to funding research in this area. The report involved an audit of government and community social cohesion programs, and case studies in three localities: Mirrabooka and Balga, Western Australia; Blacktown, New South Wales; and Murray Bridge, South Australia. Such qualitative research using similar measures of social cohesion to the quantitative surveys is also necessary and complementary in painting a picture of social cohesion in Australia.

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\(^{12}\) These indicators are belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy
How are we faring?

International indicators suggest that Australia compares exceptionally well on broad measures of social cohesion and wellbeing. Australia ranks among the top countries in a large number of categories in the OECD’s Better Life Index and ranks first overall among its 34 member states.\(^{13}\) The United Nation’s Human Development Index, which combines indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income, ranks Australia second amongst UN member-states,\(^{14}\) placing it at the forefront of highly developed nations. Australia is also ranked second among developed nations for pride in nationality\(^{15}\) and, along with Canada, ranks as the developed nation most receptive to immigration.\(^{16,17}\)

Australian studies also indicate a broad level of cohesion at a national level. The 2012 Mapping Social Cohesion National Report, for example, suggests a large measure of stability in Australian society and points to a nation that has maintained a high level of positive outcomes over time. This is most evidenced in responses to specific questions:

- the vast majority of Australians have a high level of identification with their country with 92 per cent expressing a strong sense of belonging
- 87 per cent take pride in the Australian way of life
- 91 per cent believe that maintaining the Australian way of life and culture is important
- 87 per cent indicate that ‘taking all things into consideration’, they are happy with their lives
- 82 per cent agree that Australia is ‘a land of opportunity where in the long run, hard work brings a better life’
- 71 per cent express satisfaction with their financial position.

In the 2013 Mapping Social Cohesion National Report positive responses were consistently high across demographics and suggest that multiculturalism is established as a strong and supported ‘brand’ that resonates with the Australian people:

- 84 per cent of respondents agree that ‘multiculturalism has been good for Australia’
- 75 per cent agree that it ‘benefits the economic development of Australia’
- 71 per cent agree that it ‘encourages immigrants to be part of the Australian society’
- 60 per cent believe that multiculturalism ‘strengthens the Australian way of life’.

These combined results suggest that Australians support an Australian multicultural liberal democracy, and that they recognise both the rights and obligations attached to Australian

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\(^{13}\) OECD 2011, Better Life Index, [http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/)


\(^{15}\) World Values Survey

\(^{16}\) Mapping Social Cohesion 2012: National Report

citizenship. However while these results were encouraging, the 2013 National Report also identified a range of issues which warrant attention:

- A marked increase in reported experience of discrimination (at 19 per cent up from 12 per cent in 2012, the highest recorded since 2007)
- A decline in levels of personal and institutional trust.

The 2013 Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee report also found that a greater focus on building community capital is required to improve social cohesion outcomes, particularly in neighbourhoods with high immigrant concentrations.

Similarly, the most recent Mapping Social Cohesion Neighbourhood Surveys (2012) report examined the local neighbourhood level and sub-groups (listed below) within the population and suggests that more work needs to be done. The 2012 Mapping Social Cohesion Neighbourhoods surveys found that the social cohesion indicators in areas of high immigration and cultural diversity are significantly below the national average. The survey found lower levels of trust, sense of safety, political participation and involvement in volunteer work and higher levels of discrimination. There was also evidence of disaffection and negativity regarding immigration among a minority of third generation Australians.

This latter finding is also reflected in analysis of attitudes within sub-groups of the Australian population. These indicate that negative views of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity are more likely to be found among those:

- in difficult financial circumstances
- without post-school qualifications
- over the age of 65
- resident outside of capital cities
- residents of Queensland and Western Australia
- third generation Australians.\(^{18}\)

Among these sub-groups of the population:

- 48 per cent believe the immigration intake is too high
- 40 per cent indicate their attitudes to Muslim people are ‘very negative’ or ‘somewhat negative’
- 43 per cent ‘strongly disagree’ with government assistance to ethnic minorities to maintain their culture and traditions.

These results suggest sub-groups within the population which may be more likely to agree with or support discriminatory policies relating to immigration, which if translated into action

\(^{18}\) The definition of third generation Australian used in the survey is: respondent born in Australia, both parents born in Australia. The category includes third plus generation Australian (i.e. fourth, fifth, and higher generation)
would present a threat to social cohesion, particularly in areas of high immigrant populations. This reinforces the ongoing importance of efforts to promote and extend the benefits of migration for all Australians, while addressing racism and discrimination where it exists.

**Community tensions and racism in Australia**

Compared with widespread incidences of unrest that have characterised many countries around the world, Australian communities are remarkably harmonious and resilient. There have however been incidents of social unrest and tension in Australia. These include:

- the Macquarie Fields and Cronulla riots in 2005
- assaults on Indian students during 2009 and 2010
- protests in central Sydney following the release of a controversial film about the Prophet Mohammed in September 2012
- recent local disputes between youth of different cultural backgrounds; and between new arrivals and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in 2012 and 2013
- intermittent ethnic tensions stemming from interpretations of historical events, or escalation of familial or neighbourhood disputes.

The Council’s community visits reinforced current literature and research which cautions that racism remains an ongoing challenge within segments of the Australian population, which impacts negatively upon all dimensions of social cohesion. As previously mentioned, the 2013 *Mapping Social Cohesion* survey findings indicated a marked increase in the reported experience of discrimination. The findings also showed a large variation in the experience of discrimination within sub-groups. The highest experience of discrimination was reported by respondents born in Malaysia, India, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Indonesia, China and Hong Kong.\(^{19}\) The Australian Human Rights Commission has also reported a 59 per cent increase in reporting of discrimination in the 2012–2013 financial year.

These incidents demonstrate that while Australia has a stable history of resilient multiculturalism, governments must remain pro-active to ensure durable and meaningful social cohesion into the future.

**Where to from here?**

While Australia is doing well on many indicators of social cohesion at the national level, at the neighbourhood level the picture is patchy. Australian social cohesion is strong, but suffers from contradictions and polarisations: multiculturalism is supported, but discrimination is increasing; social cohesion is strong at the national level, but weak in some neighbourhoods and subgroups.

These findings suggest that Australia should never be complacent when it comes to combatting racism, addressing community tensions, or building social cohesion. There is also an opportunity to strengthen the narrative of Australian citizenship, and its balance of rights and responsibilities.

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Chapter 2
Case studies: Social cohesion success stories

This chapter presents case studies of the successes and challenges of social cohesion at the local level. The following case studies from the Council's community visits demonstrate that the key themes and opportunities as identified by the Council can contribute to the development, enhancement or maintenance of social cohesion in Australian communities.

Council members consulted with stakeholders such as community groups and organisations, local government and police, schools, and migrant resource centres in 13 local jurisdictions across metropolitan and rural locations in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland.

The case studies show that the challenges and opportunities of developing and sustaining socially cohesive communities are not limited by geography, demographic size or the size of the migrant population. Each of the communities is actively working toward stronger social cohesion and community harmony through methods such as supportive local government, productive diversity through industry, community engagement and partnerships, and youth leadership strategies.

The first case study demonstrates the role of supportive local government in building and maintaining social cohesion. The second case study highlights the importance of productive partnerships in developing productive diversity. The third example shows the benefit of community engagement through community coordination, positive leadership, and mentoring. The last example illustrates the success of youth leadership strategies through schools.
Supportive local government

City of Stirling, Western Australia

The City of Stirling provides an example of fostering local engagement through productive partnerships; and targeting social cohesion efforts towards youth, women and new arrivals.

The City of Stirling is a local government area with a population of around 206,000, located in Perth’s northern suburbs about ten kilometres from the city centre. Stirling is one of the most diverse local governments in Western Australia with over 34 per cent of residents speaking a language other than English at home. Over the past ten years there has been a significant influx of new and emerging communities arriving in the Mirrabooka region in particular.

The cultural diversity of this area has provided the City of Stirling with social cohesion challenges, but also opportunities for celebrations and greater understanding of each other. Stirling has taken the approach of acting as a hub to pull the community together. They have been particularly successful with this over the past five years or so, administering a range of community support services and creating connections between service providers. Stirling council’s philosophy is to act as a support structure, offering connections and seed funding to other community organisations.

Stirling council works in productive partnerships with other providers to offer a range of programs such as: volunteer transport, cultural diversity projects, home support services, financial counselling, family services, children’s services, a ‘supporting multicultural families’ program, English workshops, and a women’s centre.

Youth engagement initiatives offer mentoring to youth from refugee backgrounds. The Cultural Fusion program offers beatball (a basketball competition for youth from diverse backgrounds), leadership and mentoring for youth from diverse backgrounds to express themselves (through activities such as dance), and cultural orientation tours for culturally and linguistically diverse participants to better understand Aboriginal history and culture.

Stirling council is currently working on a recreation centre for cultural groups to be able to come together and share space to be completed in 2014. The council is also involved in a local Social Inclusion Committee which fosters connections and gives all services a chance to coordinate with each other.
The City of Charles Sturt provides an example of creating a feeling of belonging by visibly promoting diversity and making it a part of the community’s identity; while building trust through facilitating understanding between groups from different backgrounds.

The City of Charles Sturt is a local government area with a population of around 110,000 in northwest Adelaide. The City of Charles Sturt has a long history as a multicultural area, especially since World War II when there was an influx of Eastern Europeans. 26 per cent of the City of Charles Sturt’s population speaks a language other than English at home compared with an average of 17 per cent in the greater Adelaide population. Charles Sturt council has adapted well to this multicultural environment through an accessible cultural diversity policy and high visibility campaigning.

One such campaign is ‘Hello, I’m Charles Sturt’, a faces campaign where people from diverse backgrounds are photographed on posters alongside the words ‘I am Charles Sturt’ to foster understanding of the vibrant variety in the area and promote ownership and a strong sense of identity. The Charles Sturt council website also has sophisticated customised tools that can be used to undertake cultural and demographic mapping of the region’s diversity.

Charles Sturt council sees diversity as part of who they are and they include it in everything they do, rather than separating out culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal services. This is a deliberate decision to make programs and policies inclusive.

“The Charles Sturt council has a strong focus on assisting and encouraging their multicultural communities, and have introduced some very effective initiatives and programmes. They have very recently introduced a new programme to assist members of the Aboriginal communities and to engage them in activities to build their self-confidence and make them feel valued and respected for their culture and for their history as the oldest continuing indigenous culture in the world. Charles Sturt council is the first in South Australia (and possibly in Australia) to include on its website very detailed information about Aborigines and their culture.” 20

20 Quote from People of Australia Ambassador survey, 2013
Productive diversity

Rockhampton, Queensland

Rockhampton is an example of community organisations, employers, industry, local government, and the wider community working together to promote a supportive and welcoming environment for migrants and refugees and achieving productive diversity through creating employment opportunities.

In the last ten years, Rockhampton has experienced significant demographic changes, welcoming large waves of migrants and refugees. In the last five years, over 1700 migrants have settled in Rockhampton as permanent visa holders, including over 300 humanitarian migrants. The largest groups are from the Philippines, Brazil, India, South Africa, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Iran.

Migrants are initially attracted to Rockhampton for its employment opportunities. There are a number of employers actively encouraging, fostering and supporting a migrant worker population. The local meatworks, Teys Brothers, seeks to employ migrant workers as part of a mutually beneficial partnership. They find migrant workers have a high degree of loyalty to their company and fill a real need for workers. Other receptive employers in Rockhampton include Mazda and AWX Agribusiness. As Rockhampton’s Multicultural Development Association puts it:

“Since 2010 many hundreds of refugee men have travelled to Rockhampton to find work. Two years later, it is a success story of regional settlement”.

The key to this success story is not purely economic. Located in central Queensland on the Fitzroy River 600 kilometres north of Brisbane with a regional population of 116 722 people, the close-knit community and the relaxed sub-tropical environment appeals to many migrants. Unlike the bigger Australian cities, Rockhampton feels safe and uncrowded. There is also acceptance towards migrants from the Rockhampton community.

The feeling of acceptance and support is furthered by a network of migrant, refugee and community support services such as the Multicultural Development Association, ACCESS Community Services, Australian Red Cross, Central Queensland Multicultural Association, Central Queensland African Association, Central Queensland Institute of TAFE, and Local Area Multicultural Partnership. The Rockhampton Regional Council provides a welcoming framework through its Access and Equity agenda, staging formal welcomes to new refugees and running a festival of food and culture.

21 Multicultural Development Association 2012, Settlement Works: Stories from Rockhampton, pIV
Community engagement and partnerships

COM4unity Blacktown, New South Wales

COM4unity provides an example of how community coordination, engagement, and understanding towards youth can turn problems into assets. In the space of only two years, crime within Blacktown has fallen and employment is rising, both resulting from strengthened social cohesion.

Blacktown City is a geographically small community but the local government area of Blacktown itself is the second largest in New South Wales. Located in Sydney’s west, 34 km from the city centre, it is a melting pot of different cultures, nationalities, and refugee groups. Over 150 different cultures coexist in a close-knit space with a compact central business hub. Blacktown also has a large youth population, with half the population under 30.

These unique characteristics of the Blacktown community used to cause problems. The dense urban centre attracted a high rate of crime and violence, infamous for its ‘fight night’ which involved over 2000 youths. There were particular tensions between youths from African and Pacific Islander communities.

These issues continued to worsen until Superintendent Mark Wright of the local police force came up with the COM4unity initiative in September 2009. The slogan of the initiative is “Connecting Our Minds for Unity,” and the whole idea is to connect different members of the community and various community organisations together to build social cohesion. Stakeholders in the initiative include: Marist Youth Care, Westpoint Shopping Centre, SydWest Multicultural services, Youth Off the Streets, and the Rotary Club of Blacktown City among others.

One example of a COM4unity project is Operation Mingle which connects community leaders with local police, involving them in police patrols and keeping an eye on the community. This makes community safety a priority for all, as well as making the local police more well-known and integrated in the community. As Mark Wright says:

“The whole thing is about building community. It’s about that social cohesion. And the symbols are extremely important. The more they see us [police and community] together, the more they see cops running around a paddock [playing soccer] laughing, having a bit of fun, that’s really important and it sends a strong image and a strong signal”.

Another project introduced by COM4unity is the dance group Switch. This allows a formal space for the existing musical and dancing talents of local youth to be appreciated, rather than frowned upon as they used to be when youth staged impromptu performances in the local shopping centre. Other youth initiatives introduced by COM4unity focus on sport activities and employment workshops and training. These initiatives channel youth energy into productive activities and outcomes.

22 Quote from Superintendent Mark Wright, 7:30 Report, 2012
Youth leadership strategies

*Multi-Pride Program, Cranbourne Secondary School, Victoria*

The *Multi-Pride* program at Cranbourne Secondary College provides an example of how youth leadership strategies that are owned by youth (through voluntary participation) can lead to further youth-to-youth mentoring and decreases in youth conflict.

Cranbourne Secondary College is located in the suburb of Cranbourne, City of Casey, 43 km south-east of Melbourne’s central business district. Cranbourne has nearly 19,000 residents and the City of Casey is a fast-growing and multicultural area. Over 150 cultures are represented in Casey, with the five largest countries of birth other than Australia being the United Kingdom, India, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan. 28 per cent of the population of Casey speak English as a second language.

Cranbourne Secondary College embraces multiculturalism. In 2013, the school introduced *Multi-Pride*, a cultural leadership program consisting of students who volunteer to represent the diverse cultures within the school. The *Multi-Pride* program principles are no bullying, no racist comments or stereotyping, cooperation with others, making people feel welcome and safe within the school, and to be inclusive and not exclusive. This student-led program aims to reduce incidents of racism and bullying within the school and its community. Students receive leadership and teamwork training through the City of Casey to create an ongoing leadership group.

*Multi-Pride* has also been implemented at the nearby Lyndhurst, Hampton Park and Alkira Secondary Colleges. All *Multi-Pride* groups collaborate and provide an example of how diverse cultures can work together to resolve issues within the community. Students are encouraged to get involved enthusiastically in activities that support the program's principles.

The program also promotes mentoring. Students identified as leaders from different cultural groups within the school are trained to support other students. They represent the values of their cultural elders and are used as a contact group for both staff and other students with the idea of identifying and solving student issues from within or with additional support.

The success of *Multi-Pride* is reflected in how well this group of students work together—as well as with others from outside the school—in highlighting and resolving issues as they arise. Students have peers that they can go to if they have an issue. Teachers have a deeper knowledge of what is of concern among students, enabling them to provide greater and more specific support where needed. The school cohort can see that their peers are working together as a team and this is reflected in their own behaviours. This should result in a decrease in conflict between students as well as with students from other schools, and within families and communities more broadly.
Chapter 3
Opportunities: Strengthening social cohesion in Australian society

This chapter identifies and recommends future opportunities to strengthen social cohesion in Australian communities. The opportunities are grouped by objectives to:

1. **Support community capabilities:** strengthen and empower local coordination and leadership, develop community engagement and protocols for rapid and coordinated action, engage youth.

2. **Develop community structures:** develop strategic policy and program direction to maintain social stability, support research and evaluation, coordinate funding.

3. **Foster belonging and trust:** target social cohesion efforts towards at-risk communities and groups such as youth, women and new arrivals; develop a more strategic approach to intercultural and interfaith contact and dialogue; support shared spaces and communities of practice.

**Supporting community capabilities**

Critical to maintaining the strength and resilience of Australia’s social fabric, the Council sees opportunities to: strengthen and empower local partnerships, coordination and leadership; develop community engagement and protocols for rapid and coordinated action; and engage youth through mentoring, education and employment.

**Strong community capital, coordination and leadership**

Aligned with the findings of the 2013 Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee report referred to in Chapter 1, the Council is of the view that a greater focus on building community capital is required to improve social cohesion outcomes, particularly in neighbourhoods with high immigrant concentrations.

This requires development and implementation of the narrative of Australian citizenship—carefully balancing rights of ethnic communities to celebrate, practice and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language with broader obligations to the wider community. This also requires identifying and engaging community leaders. Community leadership was consistently raised as a critical ingredient to achieving lasting outcomes. To be effective, community leaders must have legitimacy, capability and a shared commitment to community
aspirations and values. Identifying and engaging ethnic and religious leaders was raised as a particular challenge in some locations. Inconsistent engagement was raised as an issue, with more effort required from government agencies, local councils and police in particular.

There are significant opportunities to better harness and develop the capacity of local communities to play a stronger community governance role. Local councils play a strong role here along with police, local businesses, service providers and community, religious and philanthropic groups. There are many strong examples of communities who provide the ‘backbone’ for local efforts. It is important to recognise, however, that not all communities currently have the level of community governance required to perform this role effectively. Mapping successful community governance models and facilitating the sharing of best practice will help in this regard.

During the Council’s community visits, we saw evidence of motivated and capable people working together to address local issues. These groups collaborated through forums, committees, community projects, and funding applications. Without such productive partnerships, the impact of committed individuals may be lost. Such partnerships form the cornerstone of productive diversity, especially when they provide employment opportunities for migrants through linking with industry (such as our case study in Rockhampton) or educational opportunities for youth (such as our case studies of Blacktown and Cranbourne).

Local efforts could be further strengthened by greater whole-of-government and whole of community partnerships, focusing on better coordination and communication among key stakeholders, greater clarity around roles and responsibilities, and clearly identifiable and effective community leaders. This could also assist communities in dealing with common challenges such as racism, marginalisation and disengagement. Such partnerships require ongoing engagement and genuine commitment from all parties to work together and should seek to empower and support local change agents. To be sustainable over time, this requires appropriate allocation of resources—for example, investment in community liaison officers, community governance structures, mapping and capturing best practice initiatives and facilitating shared knowledge.

Community engagement and protocols for rapid and coordinated action

Another theme which emerged from consultations was the importance of sustained, meaningful and effective engagement by government to achieve lasting outcomes at the community level. Engagement requires more than just ‘being in the room’ or ‘listening to feedback’. It also requires long term engagement to complement rapid interventions to achieve short term outcomes. A more strategic and sustained approach to community engagement, particularly in areas such as intercultural and interfaith dialogue would benefit from a whole-of-government and whole of community approach. At a macro level, there is also a need for greater clarity on what we are seeking to achieve in this important area of public policy to better inform and target community engagement strategies.

As a part of this strategy there is an ongoing need to address issues of discrimination and marginalisation in Australian communities. This requires at the front end a sharper focus on building community capital and opportunities for social mobility, particularly in neighbourhoods with high immigrant populations. It requires ongoing partnerships with local communities to engage within and across ethnic and religious groups. Creating strong bonds within the community drives a sense of belonging, while creating effective bridges across the
Community helps build trust. Strong community capital helps build resilience, agency and enables rapid and coordinated responses. These qualities are particularly valuable in addressing social cohesion challenges.

While Australia has a stable history of resilient multiculturalism, there have been incidents of social unrest and tension in Australian communities. The Council recognises that an escalation in social tensions, particularly when violence toward the public takes place, requires effective and coordinated responses from a range of government and non-government players. This is particularly important, for example, in building resilience to violent extremism and countering extremist narratives.

This emphasises the ongoing importance of government initiatives (such as the Countering Violent Extremism program and the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy) that seek to engage and support local communities to address potential drivers for social division and conflict. Feedback from communities suggests that effective community governance and strong local leadership can play a powerful role in easing community tensions and responding to social cohesion risks when they arise, particularly when combined with broader protocols to govern effective and targeted responses across government. Enhancing the community engagement and outreach capacity of key social policy and service delivery agencies is also critical to effective, rapid and coordinated action.

Engaging youth

Youth need to be a target group for social cohesion efforts. There have been many cases of youth disengagement and tensions in areas with high diversity and low socioeconomic indicators, in particular between youth of different cultural backgrounds, and also between youth from new and emerging communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

Opportunities for engaging youth could be developed by encouraging greater youth engagement and ownership through youth leadership and mentoring. While there are a host of common strategies for engaging youth (such as through sports and the creative arts), successful outcomes are best achieved where young people themselves determine, drive and have genuine ownership over projects. The Council is encouraged by the strong emphasis placed on youth engagement and mentoring in many locations and across a range of government and community sponsored programs. Mentoring young leaders is rightfully viewed as critically important and supporting these efforts should remain an ongoing priority. This emphasis recognises that youth not only experience unique challenges but can play a powerful role in bringing communities together. This latter role is particularly important in helping to engage parents and elders in the community.

Using schools and sporting or recreational facilities as community hubs appears another strategy with strong support at the community level, offering a positive and familiar space to engage young people and their parents. Bringing youth from different backgrounds together through programs has been successful for addressing youth tensions in some local neighbourhoods. An example of this is youth conferences run by the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network in Queensland.

Education is important; however, a less developed area of focus is employment opportunities for youth in transitional stages. More employment programs and opportunities for productive diversity could be further developed through partnerships with industry.
Developing community structures

The Council believes that the government has a timely opportunity to provide leadership to direct this critical social policy area through: a National Partnership and Strategy to inform the development and implementation of a National Social Cohesion Framework. To keep such a framework on track, the Council notes the benefit of a more strategic approach to research and evaluation, and opportunities to develop a more coordinated approach to funding within such a framework.

National partnerships and frameworks for social cohesion

The Council was struck by the proactive approach a number of jurisdictions and local communities have taken to ensure that efforts to build cohesion are underpinned by effective community governance. The Council is also encouraged to note the increasing use of strategic plans to establish goals, priorities and targets.

A common theme in consultations was that without proper coordination and planning, the efforts of committed individuals and key agencies may not translate into effective and lasting outcomes. It was also clear that the ‘silod’ approach to funding across government is a significant impediment to coordinated approaches to service delivery at the grass roots level. Greater whole-of-government and whole of community planning and coordination is required to: address risks of duplication and overlap, overcome current siloed approaches across government, and provide a framework to support effective action.

There are a number of existing initiatives at national, state and local levels which could be coordinated under a partnership or framework. Local councils, state and territory government agencies, and public institutions in a number of jurisdictions use instruments such as multicultural action plans to promote cultural diversity and build trust and harmony in their communities. Many communities also leverage off their strong and vibrant partnerships to ensure coordination and planning among key stakeholders. The Council welcomes the focus over recent years on addressing individual barriers to effective participation in the social, cultural and economic life of Australia. The Social Inclusion Agenda played a role in advancing and sustaining this focus. The Council also acknowledges the focus on collaborative efforts to address racism, discrimination and marginalisation in our society and looks forward to ongoing engagement in this work through the National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy.

At a national level, those agencies that employ community liaison officer-type networks, such as the Departments of Social Services and Human Services, are well placed to engage effectively at a community level. Linking other agencies into such existing networks may prove useful in replicating effective engagement with communities across the key social policy portfolios. At a community level, greater policy focus is needed to support local efforts to create a sense of belonging, promote trust and offer members the opportunity of social
mobility. In other words, social cohesion currently lacks a clear and integrated policy framework. Greater whole-of-government and whole of community partnerships are vital to achieving better outcomes at both the national and local level. During the Council’s community visits there was a clear consensus that more could be achieved through cooperation and partnership at all levels and there was clear willingness from all parties to engage more cooperatively as part of a broader strategy. A National Partnership and Strategy for Social Cohesion could act as an umbrella to harness existing initiatives by drawing together the three tiers of government with key community, religious, business and service delivery organisations.

**Supporting strategic research and evaluation**

Quality research and evaluation is critical to informing government policy and driving more targeted efforts at both the national and local levels. Research and evaluation allows for priorities to be informed by robust evidence, resources to be targeted to communities most in need and outcomes to be evaluated against international, national and local benchmarks.

While there is some evidence of cooperative funding of research and evaluation, this would appear the exception rather than the rule. Given the whole-of-government or whole of community nature of social cohesion, a more strategic and cooperative approach is needed.

Such an approach would benefit from the identification of: research and evaluation priorities, opportunities for research partnerships, the pooling of research dollars, and clear and accessible platforms for dissemination of findings. Ideally, such an approach would be informed by a clear policy framework as well as structured input from government and non-government sources.

Consideration should be given by government to funding qualitative work, in tandem with quantitative surveying, on a more comprehensive and ongoing basis. The Council is of the view that increased local area surveying (both qualitative and quantitative) along with independent mapping of successful grassroots initiatives that may be portable and useful to other communities would be of particular benefit to developing a coordinated approach to social cohesion.

**A coordinated approach to funding**

While acknowledging recent growth in government funding flowing through to communities and a greater recognition of the importance of place-based approaches, the broad approach to funding for community-based efforts remains a significant issue.

Too often, funding sources are short-term, vulnerable to shifting priorities, issue-specific, and disconnected from a broader strategy and point of coordination. In practice, those who seek and receive funding describe a complex funding environment, highly burdensome procurement, reporting and accountability arrangements and low levels of strategic coordination and planning across funding agencies. For those at the coal face of service delivery, navigating this complexity—and the red tape that accompanies it—is a very real issue that consumes resources that would otherwise be spent delivering services and achieving outcomes.

As discussed, community governance arrangements can play a key role in helping to coordinate and streamline service delivery at the local level. However, this depends on the
strength of local networks and should not be considered an alternative to greater coordination among funding agencies. There would appear to be benefits in a broader review into social cohesion funding that looks at the complexity of current structures at all levels of government and seeks to simplify the relationship between government and those who deliver its services. Such a review would require mechanisms to seek community input and would benefit from a central agency focus.

**Fostering belonging and trust**

Fostering a sense of belonging and trust within and between communities is crucial for a socially cohesive nation. The Council sees this being achieved through targeting social cohesion efforts towards at-risk communities as well as groups such as youth, women and new arrivals; developing a more strategic approach to intercultural and interfaith contact and dialogue; and supporting shared spaces and communities of practice.

**Targeting social cohesion efforts towards at-risk communities**

As discussed, while social cohesion is strong at the national level, indicators in neighbourhoods of high cultural diversity are significantly below the national average. This is reflected in lower levels of trust, sense of safety, political participation and involvement in volunteer work, and higher levels of discrimination.

An efficient approach requires a more targeted focus on communities and groups which experience lower levels of social cohesion, with attendant strategies to build trust, civic engagement, community resilience and a positive culture of hope, reward and opportunity. Commissioning in-depth locality surveys would help identify priority locations and enable a more targeted and evidence based approach to investment. Adopting a longitudinal approach to such surveying would assist in tracking outcomes over time and help demonstrate return on investment. In terms of sub-groups identified as victims or as perpetrators of racism and discrimination, an ongoing, whole-of-government and whole-of-community commitment is needed to pinpoint where racism and discrimination occurs, and to target social cohesion efforts to these sub-groups and localities.

Indicators also suggest that social cohesion efforts should be targeted towards youth, women and new arrivals. In particular local areas, these groups have experienced marginalisation or community tensions. For example, there have been regional tensions between youth of different cultural backgrounds; and between new arrivals and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups. Research in 2013 by the Diversity Council Australia has found that women coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience a double disadvantage. 23 When the need exists, there should be provisions made to provide programs to address the specific social cohesion needs of such groups. Greater flexibility in

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23 Diversity Council Australia 2013. *Capitalising on Culture Report*
program expenditure, particularly among, key social policy agencies, is also important to support place-based initiatives for communities and groups in urgent need.

**Developing a strategic approach to intercultural and interfaith contact and dialogue**

There is strong evidence in the literature of the benefits of frequent and positive intercultural and interfaith contact and dialogue. Creating bonds within and bridges across cultural and religious groups is particularly important to building community capital in areas of high cultural and religious diversity. Neighbourhoods with strong ‘trust and glue’ within and across ethnic and religious groups are more cohesive, resilient and better placed to respond to events that would otherwise risk community harmony.

Supported by effective leadership, coordination and planning, such contact can help promote interfaith and intercultural understanding, reduce prejudice, improve relations between different ethnic and religious groups, fight marginalisation and exclusion, and enhance belonging and trust. The Council was encouraged during community visits and in briefings from a number of key agencies to note the recognition of the role that interfaith and intercultural contact plays in building cohesive and resilient communities. Council members were also encouraged by the ongoing efforts of many communities to use intercultural contact to promote reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the broader community. For example, the Department of Social Services’ *Diversity and Social Cohesion Program* and the Attorney General’s *Countering Violent Extremism Program* fund a range of community based projects that support regular and positive interfaith and intercultural contact.

While encouraged by the innovative and effective strategies employed across a range of communities, the Council believes that more could be done in this area. One of the key recommendations of the *Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee* Report was a call for more, longer term funding to support collaborative projects that create opportunities for frequent, positive intercultural contact. The recent response to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration’s *Inquiry into Migration and Multiculturalism in Australia* also called for a more strategic approach to promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding and contact. While strongly supportive of such calls, the Council would stress the importance of ensuring whole-of-government or whole-of-community input and commitment. In particular, a strategic approach to interfaith and intercultural contact and dialogue at a national level needs to support and be informed by efforts at the neighbourhood level.

**Building shared spaces and communities of practice**

Of some concern, during its community visits the Council observed some communities struggling to address issues for which other (sometimes neighbouring) communities had successful strategies in place.

Mechanisms to support increased sharing of innovative and effective strategies across the breadth of social cohesion activities would appear a significant priority. While there is

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24 While a broad review of funding in this area would be desirable, the Council notes with concern that key Commonwealth funded programs (such as the aforementioned Diversity and Social Cohesion Program and Countering Violent Extremism program) remain chronically over-subscribed

evidence of communities adopting similar strategies to address common challenges, more could be done to support a greater community of practice and sharing of experiences across the board.

Shared community spaces, schools, festivals, celebrations, sport, art, and other recreational pursuits were frequently cited as important to building ‘trust and glue’ within and across communities. Opportunities to share innovative and effective strategies, and disseminate information and resources, would also greatly assist grassroots efforts to build community cohesion. A central repository—such as a Clearing House—would assist in this regard but should be supported by greater opportunities for face-to-face learning and peer-to-peer networking and information sharing. Increasing our understanding of what works and why is also critical to establishing a greater community of practice but needs to be supported by rigorous and independent research and evaluation. A useful starting point could be to identify successful local community governance and coordination models (such as COM4unity in Blacktown) with a view to identifying both room for improvement and elements that may be transportable to other neighbourhoods.

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26 There are a range of websites for sharing innovative and effective practices in a range of discrete areas of social cohesion, such as Taking the Initiative - Police working with Australia’s diverse communities and Resilient Communities (which shares ideas about keeping communities united and resilient in the face of violent extremism). A central repository could draw upon these and other resources.

27 The Department of Immigration and Border Protection, for example, has engaged the Australian National University (ANU) in an Australian Research Council project, titled Building Successful Diverse Communities: What Works and Why? The project is focusing on how to build successful, diverse communities through grants funded under the Department’s Diversity and Social Cohesion Program (DSCP)
List of Australian Multicultural Council Members

Judge Rauf Soulio (Chair) (SA)
Judge of the District Court of South Australia

Ms Gail Ker OAM (Deputy Chair) (QLD)
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