



Australian Government

Department of Immigration and Citizenship

Media

Fact Sheet 6 - Australia's Multicultural Policy

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Multicultural is a term that describes the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society. Cultural and linguistic diversity was a feature of life for the first Australians, well before European settlement. It remains a feature of modern Australian life, and it continues to give us distinct social, cultural and economic advantages.

Australia's multicultural policy, *The People of Australia*, was launched in Sydney on 16 February 2011. It is a landmark policy that demonstrates the government's unwavering commitment to a multicultural Australia. As the policy states, our multicultural composition is at the heart of Australia's national identity and intrinsic to our history and character.

The policy embraces our shared values and cultural traditions. It recognises our rights and responsibilities as enshrined in our citizenship pledge and supports the rights of all Australians to celebrate, practise and maintain their cultural heritage, traditions and language within the law and free from discrimination.

See: [The People of Australia - Australia's Multicultural Policy](#) (1.1MB PDF file)

Australia's multicultural policy acknowledges that government services and programs must be responsive to the needs of our culturally diverse communities. It commits to an access and equity framework to ensure that the onus is on government to provide equitable services to Australians from all backgrounds. Australia's multicultural character gives us a competitive edge in an increasingly globalised world. Multiculturalism is about all Australians.

This vision is reflected in the four principles that underpin this multicultural policy:

- 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.
- 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.
- The Australian Government welcomes the economic, trade and investment benefits, which arise from our successful multicultural nation.
- 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 the law.

There are three important new initiatives that support the policy:

1. The Australian Multicultural Council (AMC) – a new independent body to replace the current Australian Multicultural Advisory Council. The AMC will advise and consult on policies and emerging issues to inform a national multicultural Australian strategy.
2. A National Anti-Racism Partnership and Strategy – a partnership arrangement between various government departments. It will include extensive consultations with non-government organisations and draw together expertise on anti-racism and multicultural matters.
3. A Multicultural Youth Sports Partnership Program – a program to connect youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds into neighborhood sports and community organisations.

Parliamentary statement on racial tolerance

In October 1996, the government formally reaffirmed its commitment to racial respect. The Prime Minister moved a statement on racial tolerance in the Australian Parliament's House of Representatives.

The statement read:

'That this House:

- reaffirms its commitment to the right of all Australians to enjoy equal rights and be treated with equal respect regardless of race, colour, creed or origin
- reaffirms its commitment to maintaining an immigration policy wholly non-discriminatory on grounds of race, colour creed or origin
- reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage
- reaffirms its commitment to maintain Australia as a culturally diverse, tolerant and open society, united by an overriding commitment to our nation, and its democratic institutions and values
and
- denounces racial intolerance in any form as incompatible with the kind of society we are and want to be.'

The statement was supported by the Opposition Leader and carried unanimously.

A brief history of Australia's multicultural policies

Background

Australia's approach to immigration from federation until the latter part of the 20th century, in effect, excluded non-European immigration. The White Australia policy as it was commonly described was progressively dismantled by the Australian Government after World War II.

The prevailing attitude to migrant settlement up until this time was based on the expectation of 'assimilation' – that is, that migrants should shed their cultures and languages and rapidly become indistinguishable from the host population.

From the mid-1960s until 1973, when the final vestiges of the White Australia policy were removed, policies started to examine assumptions about assimilation. They recognised that large numbers of

migrants, especially those whose first language was not English, experienced hardships as they settled in Australia, and required more direct assistance.

They also recognised the importance of ethnic organisations in helping with migrant settlement.

Expenditure on migrant assistance and welfare increased in the early 1970s in response to these needs.

For more information please refer to Fact Sheet 8 on the department's website.

See: [Fact Sheet 8 - Abolition of the 'White Australia' policy](#)

Multiculturalism

By 1973, the term 'multiculturalism' had been introduced and migrant groups were forming state and national associations to maintain their cultures, and promote the survival of their languages and heritages within mainstream institutions.

Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki pursued multiculturalism as a social policy while chair of the Social Patterns Committee of the Immigration Advisory Council to the Whitlam Labor Government.

- 1973 – Al Grassby, Minister for Immigration in the Whitlam Government issued a reference paper entitled *A multi-cultural society for the future*.
- 1975 – At a ceremony proclaiming the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, the Prime Minister referred to Australia as a 'multicultural nation'. The Prime Minister, and Leader of the Opposition, made speeches demonstrating for the first time that multiculturalism was becoming a major political priority on both sides of politics.
- 1977 – the Australian Ethnic Affairs Council, appointed to advise the Fraser Liberal-Country Party Government, recommended a public policy of multiculturalism in its report *Australia as a multicultural society*.
- 1978 – the first official national multicultural policies were implemented by the Fraser Government, in accord with recommendations of the *Galbally Report* in the context of government programs and services for migrants.
- 1979 – an act of parliament established the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA), whose objectives included raising awareness of cultural diversity and promoting social cohesion, understanding and tolerance.
- 1986 – the AIMA Act was repealed by the Hawke Government, which, in 1987, created the Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- 1989 – following community consultations and drawing on the advice of the Advisory Council for Multicultural Affairs, the Hawke Government produced the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, which had bipartisan political support.
- 1994 – a National Multicultural Advisory Council was established to review and update the national agenda. Its report, launched in June 1995, found that much had been achieved and recommended further initiatives.
- 1996 – following the election of the Howard Government in March 1996, OMA was absorbed into the then Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs.
- 1996 – parliament endorsed the *Parliamentary Statement on Racial Tolerance*.
See: [Parliamentary Statement on Racial Tolerance](#)
- 1997 – the Government announced a new National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC).
- 1999 – the Prime Minister launched NMAC's report, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards inclusiveness*.
- December 1999 – in response to the NMAC report, the government issued its multicultural policy, A New Agenda for Multicultural Australia, and NMAC was wound up.
- May 2003 – the government released its multicultural policy statement, *Multicultural*

Australia: United in Diversity. It updated the 1999 new agenda, set strategic directions for 2003–06, and included a commitment to the Council for Multicultural Australia.

See: [Multicultural Australia: United in Diversity](#) (523KB PDF file)

- December 2008 – the Australian Multicultural Advisory Council (AMAC) was officially launched by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship.
- April 2010 – AMAC presented its advice and recommendations on cultural diversity policy to government in a statement titled *The People of Australia*.

See: [The People of Australia](#) (1.0MB PDF file)

- February 2011 – Australia's new multicultural policy *The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy* was launched by the government

See: [The People of Australia – Australia's Multicultural Policy](#) (1.1MB PDF file)

Further information is available on the department's website.

See: www.immi.gov.au

The department also operates a national general enquiries line.

Telephone: 131 881

Hours of operation: Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 4.30 pm (recorded information is available outside these hours).

Fact Sheet 6, produced by the National Communications Branch, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Canberra.

Last reviewed 23 March 2011.

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