Australian Government



The Multicultural Access and Equity Policy Guide

For Australian Government departments and agencies

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Community Protection and Border Policy Branch
Department of Home Affairs
PO Box 25
BELCONNEN ACT 2616

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Executive summary

The Australian Government is acting through the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy to ensure that its programmes and services meet the needs of all Australians, whatever their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The policy centres on six commitments essential to the effective delivery of government programmes and services in a multicultural society: leadership; engagement; performance; capability; responsiveness; and openness.

Australian Government departments and agencies are required to apply the commitments to all relevant activities, including those conducted on behalf of government by contractors and service delivery partners.

In this way the policy seeks to build multicultural access and equity considerations into all relevant policies, programmes and services as a central element, not just as an add-on.

The Department of Home Affairs has lead responsibility for coordination of the policy and will support departments and agencies to meet their obligations. The Department will update resources for staff and establish an interagency support group to share the great work many departments and agencies are already doing to remove barriers of language and culture from their interactions with the public.

Departments and agencies are accountable for their multicultural access and equity performance to the Government, the Parliament and the public. Each year, they are required to report on their multicultural access and equity actions and outcomes in an annual snapshot of the policy's implementation prepared by the Department and presented to the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC). Every three years the Department, in consultation with the AMC, is also obligated to prepare a whole-of-government review report on the policy to the Government for tabling in Parliament.

The overriding goal of the policy is to ensure that departments and agencies take primary responsibility for identifying, understanding and responding to the needs of their clients. More broadly, it aims to harness the economic and social benefits of our diversity and build a more productive and socially cohesive Australia for all of us.

Introduction

This guide has been developed to help Australian Government departments and agencies understand and meet their obligations under the Multicultural Access and Equity Policy.

It sets out revised arrangements for the policy's implementation. These new arrangements aim to overcome barriers to access and equity by encouraging greater cross agency collaboration and reducing internal red tape so that departments and agencies can better target areas of high need.

The guide also includes a range of practical strategies that departments and agencies can implement to improve their multicultural access and equity performance.

Acknowledgments

The Department would like to acknowledge the valuable assistance of Australian Government departments and agencies in compiling this resource, in particular the Australian Tax Office and the Department of Human Services.



1 The Australian Government's Multicultural Access and Equity Policy

The Multicultural Access and Equity Policy (the policy) acknowledges we live in a multicultural society and that there is an obligation on Australian Government departments and agencies to ensure their programmes and services are accessible by all eligible Australians, responsive to their needs, and deliver equitable outcomes for them, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

> **Access** – means that barriers of culture and language should not impede the delivery of Australian Government programmes and services to those who are entitled to receive them.
>
> **Equity** – means that Australian Government programmes and services should deliver outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse Australians on par with those for other Australians.

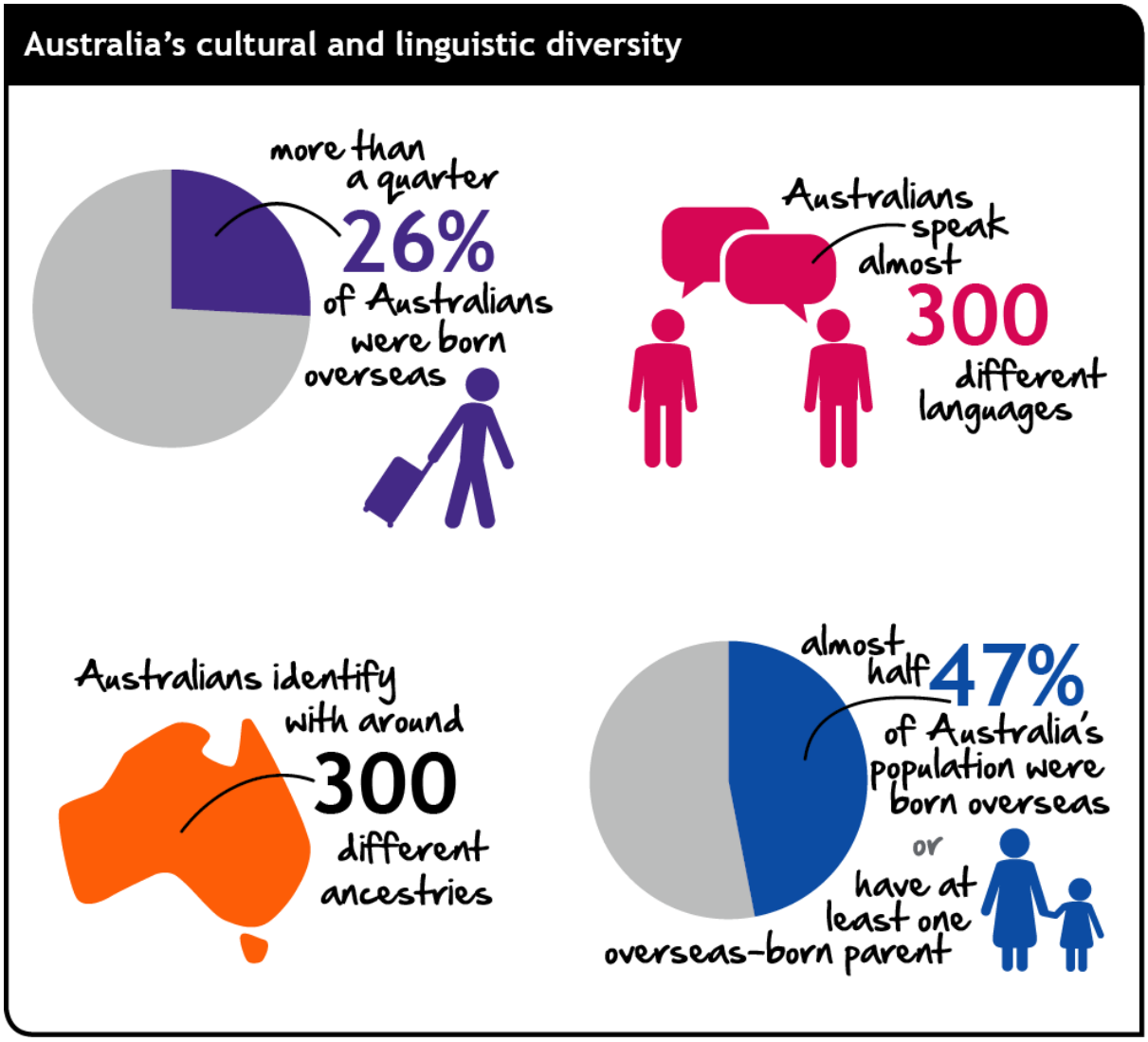
The policy takes a client centric approach with the focus being on what departments and agencies can do to adjust their mainstream policies, programmes and services to provide equitable access for all Australians.

The policy relates not only to service delivery departments and agencies but all Australian Government activity, including policy development and advice, audit and assessment, budgeting and finance, as well as activities conducted on behalf of government by contractors and service delivery partners.

The aim of the policy is to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to achieve their potential and participate in the social, economic and cultural life of our nation; helping to drive our future prosperity and build stronger, more cohesive communities.

Policy importance

A commitment to access to services, and equity in outcomes for all, has long been a feature of Australia's successful multicultural society. Today, given the diversity of our population, it remains as relevant as ever.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011 Census

Our cultural and linguistic diversity is a great national strength and presents a challenge to government to deliver programmes and services in ways that are responsive to all Australians, whatever their backgrounds.

Policy target groups

The broad focus of the policy is Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

However, it is important to recognise that these communities are themselves considerably diverse.

For example, many migrants to Australia have strong English language skills and are familiar with the predominant cultural norms such that barriers to access and equity may not arise. But for other migrants with different backgrounds and migration stories, the challenges faced can be significant. It is to these people that the policy is targeted.

Multicultural Access and Equity Policy target groups

- migrants with low levels of English language proficiency
- refugee and humanitarian entrants
- visibly different migrants
- newly arrived communities and individuals with low levels of knowledge of the Australian system
- other migrants experiencing difficulties in accessing services based on age, gender, sexuality, disability, youth or coming from collectivist cultures

The policy's goal is not to give individuals within the target groups any special advantage, but to achieve equality of opportunity and equity of outcomes for all Australians.

Groups not covered by the policy

To avoid duplication of policy and reporting obligations, the policy does not extend to other sectors of the community, for example Indigenous Australians and people with disability. The distinct needs of these and other groups are addressed through separate initiatives.

2 Policy implementation

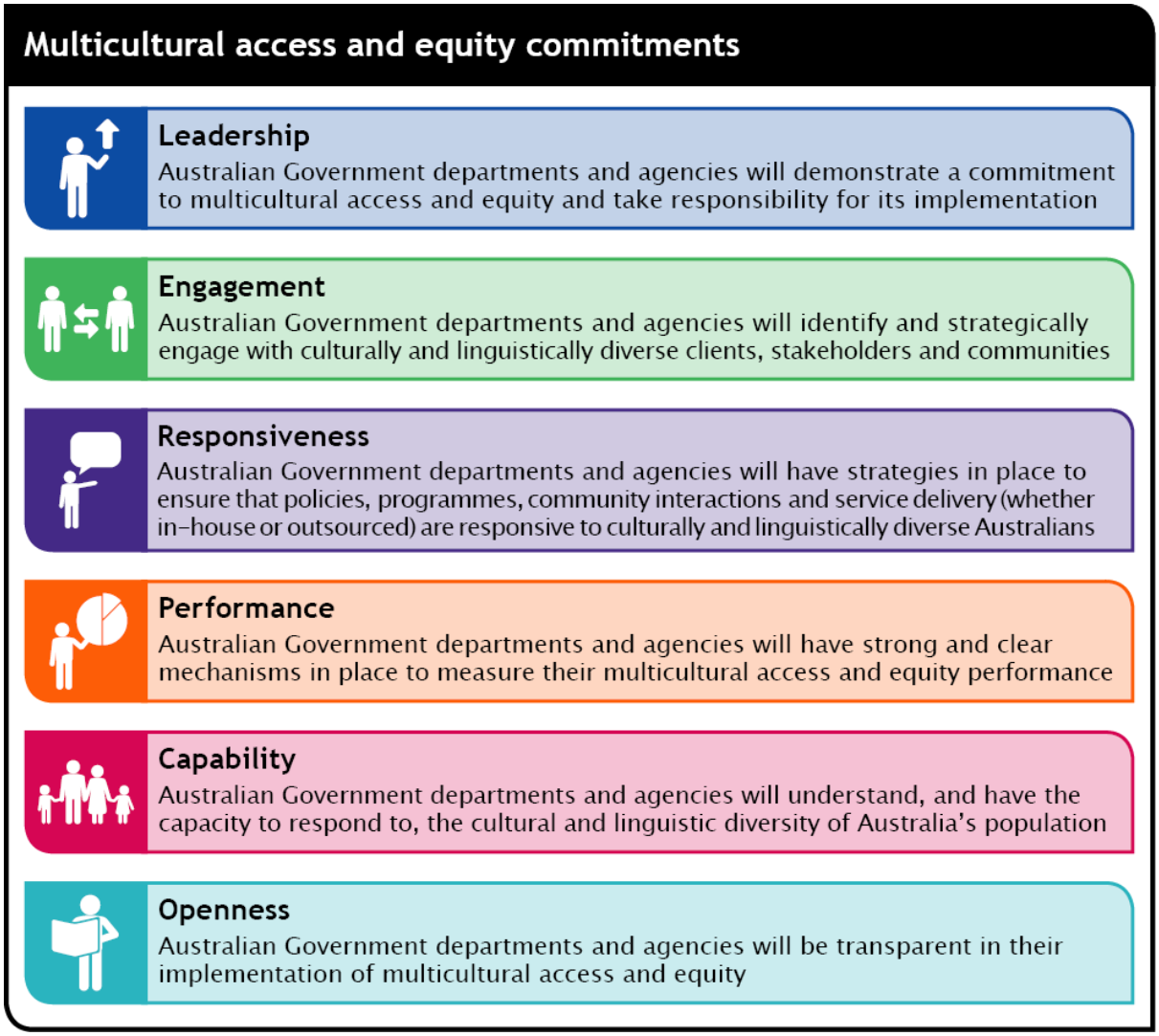
The policy contains six commitments essential to the effective delivery of government programmes and services in a multicultural society: leadership; engagement; performance; capability; responsiveness; and openness.

Australian Government departments and agencies are required to apply these six commitments in their day-to-day activities.

Given the broad range of activities performed across government, the degree to which each of the commitments apply to individual departments and agencies will vary.

It is the responsibility of each department and agency to determine the practical actions they will take, and the emphasis they will place on each commitment, depending on their business imperative.

This flexible approach seeks to ensure that effort and resources are targeted towards those programmes and services where the application of multicultural access and equity principles is likely to make the most difference for clients from CALD backgrounds.



Reporting and accountability

The Department of Home Affairs has lead responsibility for coordination of the policy and its implementation.

Each year, Australian Government departments and agencies will be asked to report to the Department on their multicultural access and equity performance as part of an annual snapshot of the policy's implementation. The annual snapshot will be presented to the Australian Multicultural Council (AMC).

Every three years the Department, in consultation with the AMC, will consolidate the annual reports departments and agencies have provided to prepare a whole-of-government review report on the policy's performance to the Government for tabling in Parliament.

Both the annual snapshot and the triennial report will incorporate feedback from Australia's CALD communities regarding the delivery of Australian Government services received through consultations and research coordinated by the Department.

Support

To help Australian Government departments and agencies meet their multicultural access and equity obligations, the Department will establish an interagency support group.

The group's focus will be to explore partnership and coordination opportunities, share models of good practice and encourage collaboration.

The Department will also update associated resources, including whole-of-government standards, to provide practical steps that departments and agencies can take to reflect the diversity of their clients in the way they carry out their work.

Scope

The policy applies to all non-corporate Commonwealth entities under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act).

The Multicultural Access and Equity Policy at a glance

Principle

Australian Government programmes and services should be accessible by all eligible Australians, responsive to their needs, and deliver equitable outcomes for them, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds

Commitments



Leadership

Australian Government departments and agencies will demonstrate a commitment to multicultural access and equity and take responsibility for its implementation



Engagement

Australian Government departments and agencies will identify and strategically engage with culturally and linguistically diverse clients, stakeholders and communities



Responsiveness

Australian Government departments and agencies will have strategies in place to ensure that policies, programmes, community interactions and service delivery (whether in-house or outsourced) are responsive to culturally and linguistically diverse Australians



Performance

Australian Government departments and agencies will have strong and clear mechanisms in place to measure their multicultural access and equity performance



Capability

Australian Government departments and agencies will understand, and have the capacity to respond to, the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia's population



Openness

Australian Government departments and agencies will be transparent in their implementation of multicultural access and equity

Support for Australian Government departments & agencies

- Updated resources to provide practical examples of how to improve multicultural access and equity performance
- New interagency support group to encourage collaboration and share models of good practice
- Updated whole-of-government standards

Governance & accountability

- Annual performance snapshot presented to the Australian Multicultural Council
- Targeted consultations and research to collect feedback from culturally and linguistically diverse clients
- Triennial whole-of-government performance report tabled in Parliament

Outcomes

Effective and responsive delivery of government programmes and services

All Australians have the opportunity to participate fully in our economic and social life

Strong, inclusive, cohesive society

3 Applying the multicultural access and equity commitments

Multicultural access and equity should be built into all relevant policies, programmes and services as a central element, not just as an add-on.

The following strategies set out a range of practical ways that Australian Government departments and agencies can integrate multicultural access and equity considerations in their day-to-day work.

The strategies grouped under each of the six commitments are not intended to be prescriptive or all-inclusive. Determining the precise nature of the strategies that will be adopted is ultimately a matter for departments and agencies, based upon their organisational characteristics and level of interaction with CALD clients.



Leadership

Demonstrate a commitment to multicultural access and equity and take responsibility for its implementation.

Strategies

- Commit to forward planning how you will achieve your multicultural access and equity objectives across the organisation. This can be done using existing corporate planning structures or through a distinct multicultural access and equity planning tool.
- Assign a Senior Executive Officer as the dedicated point of leadership for multicultural access and equity implementation.
- Establish internal governance processes to monitor delivery of multicultural access and equity objectives, such as a reference group or steering committee.
- Create an internal network of contact officers to help identify and respond to multicultural access and equity concerns.
- Look for opportunities to recognise and promote examples of strong performance and innovation in multicultural access and equity within your department or agency and in the wider community.



Engagement

Identify and strategically engage with CALD clients, stakeholders and communities.

Strategies

- Consider a range of communication techniques to engage with clients from different backgrounds, including the use of information in languages other than English, plain English and blended information delivery methods (e.g. print, online, face-to-face).
- Set clear guidelines for when and how staff should use translating and interpreting services.
- Consult with CALD communities at all stages in policy design, planning, delivery and evaluation. Provide feedback about the outcomes of these consultations.
- Establish a forum for engaging with multicultural access and equity target groups, including peak bodies and/or community leaders with whom you can regularly consult about client perceptions of your performance and use to disseminate information to the wider community.
- Use consultative networks and communication channels that other departments or agencies may have already established to improve efficiency and help prevent consultation fatigue.
- Where appropriate, include people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds on advisory and review bodies to reflect the diversity of the wider population in decision making processes.



Responsiveness

Strategies are in place to ensure that policies, programmes, community interactions and service delivery (whether in-house or outsourced) are responsive to CALD Australians.

Strategies

- Consider the needs of clients from CALD backgrounds in all aspects of departmental or agency work (whether in-house or outsourced) including strategic planning, policy development, programme design, service delivery and assessment.
- Allow for the costs associated with delivering culturally responsive and accessible policies, programmes and services in your budget planning. Where a service delivery partner has been engaged, these costs should be factored into tender specifications.
- Ensure that any whole-of-government standards or guidelines developed by your department or agency address multicultural access and equity considerations.
- If the delivery of programmes or services is outsourced, specify multicultural access and equity accountabilities in funding partnerships, contracts, grant agreements and related guidance materials. For example, the provision of appropriate translating and interpreting services and/or the collection and reporting of data on CALD clients.
- Where appropriate, assist contracted service providers with advice and guidance on meeting their multicultural access and equity requirements.



Performance

Strong and clear mechanisms are in place to measure multicultural access and equity performance.

Strategies

- Use CALD client data collected by your department or agency to measure the effectiveness of multicultural access and equity initiatives.
- Have in place feedback, compliments and complaints mechanisms that are accessible to all clients, including those from CALD backgrounds. Include information on the availability of translating and interpreting services so that clients with no or limited English language proficiency are able to have their say.
- Engage directly with CALD communities to obtain their perceptions of policies, programmes and services through targeted face-to-face consultations, online forms or other alternative survey methods.
- Develop key performance indicators aligned to your department or agency relating to engagement with, or outcomes of services to, CALD clients.



Capability

Understand, and have the capacity to respond to, the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia's population.

Strategies

- Use CALD data sources released by other departments and agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Department to better understand the multicultural nature of your client group.
- Collect CALD data for the programmes and services you manage (whether you interact directly with them or through a contracted service provider). Key indicators of diversity could include country of birth, ancestry and/or language preferences.
- Implement training and development measures to ensure staff at all levels understand their multicultural access and equity responsibilities and are appropriately equipped with cultural awareness and competency skills.
- Conduct a cultural capability audit across your department or agency to identify cultural diversity skills within your workforce. Consider establishing a register of staff diversity and personal language skills.
- Consider a community language allowance for staff who can communicate in languages other than English and who work in roles where their language skills can be used to help clients.
- Set policies to increase the recruitment and retention of staff from CALD backgrounds.

Remember:

When collecting individuals' personal information, you must be aware of your obligations under the *Privacy Act 1988*, particularly the Australian Privacy Principles which regulate the collection, use, disclosure and storage of personal information by agencies and their contracted service providers.



Openness

Be transparent in the implementation of multicultural access and equity.

Strategies

- Incorporate outcomes of multicultural access and equity activities into your corporate reporting.
- Provide information on your multicultural access and equity performance to the Department for an annual whole-of-government snapshot and a triennial review report to the Government for tabling in Parliament.
- Share your multicultural access and equity resources and experience with other departments and agencies, and the public as appropriate. This can include CALD data you collect, CALD consultative networks you support, and examples of best practice in the design and delivery of policies, programmes and services.

Steps for departments and agencies to follow

1. Review

- Map the impact and performance of multicultural access and equity intiiatives currently udertaken across your department or agency. Identify gaps by accessing CALD client data and feedback, performance indicators and input from staff.

2. Plan

- Set out objectives for, and measures to achieve, multicultural access and equity within your department of agency. This can be done by utilising either an existing corporate planning structure or a distinct multicultural access and equity planning tool.

3. Action

- Implement your multicultural access and equity activities. Montior your progress.

4. Assess

- Evaluate your multicultural access and equity performance by drawing on CALD client data and feedback, performance indicators and input from staff.

5. Report

- Coordinate reporting on your multicultural access and equity activities and submit to the Department for consolidation and publication.

4 Conclusion

The task of achieving access and equity in all relevant policies, programmes and services is a process that continues to build over time.

While some Australian Government departments and agencies are already well advanced in this area, others may have a longer journey ahead of them to improve their responsiveness.

By demonstrating an ongoing commitment to enhance multicultural access and equity performance, departments and agencies can ensure they better meet the needs of their clients and in doing so, contribute to the broader goal of building a more prosperous, inclusive and cohesive Australia for us all.

More Information

Please email

