

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

SUBMISSION INTO THE VICTORIAN MULTICULTURAL REVIEW.

MAY 2025

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Executive summary

The Victorian Multicultural Review is a key initiative by the Victorian Government aimed at enhancing social cohesion and community harmony. It focuses on addressing racism and discrimination, promoting community harmony through interfaith dialogue and engagement, and strengthening multicultural policies. The review encourages participation from diverse multicultural Victorians to ensure that policies and programs reflect and support the community's needs. By involving the community, the review aims to create a more inclusive and harmonious society in Victoria.

The City of Greater Geelong (the City) is pleased to provide feedback into the Victorian Multicultural Review. This submission outlines the City's commitment to fostering a diverse and inclusive community, highlighting the various initiatives and programs that support multiculturalism in our region.

Key areas of focus include:

- **Community Engagement:** The City actively engages with diverse communities through consultations, events, and partnerships to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are met.
- **Support Services:** A range of support services are provided to assist migrants and refugees in settling and integrating into the community. These services include language support, employment assistance, and social inclusion programs.
- **Cultural Celebrations:** The City celebrates and funds cultural diversity through various events and festivals, promoting understanding and appreciation of different cultures.
- **Policy and Planning:** The City's policies and strategic plans are designed to promote inclusivity and address the unique challenges faced by multicultural communities.
- **Education and Awareness:** Programs are implemented to educate the broader community about the benefits of multiculturalism and to combat discrimination and racism.

The City has also made several recommendations for improvement to enhance the effectiveness of multicultural policies and programs.

These recommendations include:

- **Inclusivity and Equity:** Ensuring that all planning and service provision focus on inclusivity and equity to meet the diverse needs of the community.
- **Capacity Building:** Providing support in areas such as employment, education, and leadership to build the capacity of multicultural communities and government officers.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Continuing to promote the health and wellbeing of Victorians from diverse multicultural backgrounds, including food equity.
- **Collaboration:** Encouraging collaboration between various agencies, community groups, and advisory committees to address barriers to participation and promote inclusivity.
- **Community Feedback:** Continuing to actively seek feedback from the community to guide the development of multicultural policies and plans and ensure local context.
- **Anti-Racism Stance:** Adopting a strong, public stance against racism and discrimination to promote social cohesion and educate the public on inclusive actions.

The City is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all residents, recognising that diversity enriches the community and contributes to its social and economic vitality.

Submission

The City of Greater Geelong provides the following responses to the questions raised in the Victorian Multicultural Review.

What is your cultural background or what community does your organisation represent?

The City of Greater Geelong (City) municipality, which includes the Bellarine Peninsula, is a region characterised by a rich cultural background and diverse demographic profile. Greater Geelong, the most populated region in Victoria outside of metropolitan Melbourne, has an estimated resident population of 289,565 as of 2024. The population is forecast to grow to 396,388 by 2041.

The area has experienced significant growth in both the western and eastern corridors over the past decade, with a notable increase in residents over 65 years of age by 22.8% between 2016 and 2021. Additionally, birth rates have increased significantly, indicating a growing population of young children.

In the 2021 Census, the City of Greater Geelong had a higher proportion of recent overseas arrivals (2016–2021) compared to Regional Victoria, and a smaller proportion of long-term migrants who arrived before 2001. The overseas-born population made up 17.7% of Geelong’s residents, with the most common countries of origin being the United Kingdom, India, New Zealand, the Philippines, and China. Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in humanitarian arrivals from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, South Sudan, Congo, and Myanmar, reflecting more recent global migration trends.

In terms of ancestry, the three largest groups in the municipality in 2021 were English, Australian, and Irish. Other significant ancestries include Scottish, Italian, German, Dutch, Indian, Croatian, and Chinese.

Migration trends in the municipality show that 3.5% new residents moved from overseas. The municipality has the highest number of permanent migrants across the three migration streams (Family, Skilled, and Humanitarian) in the broader Geelong region.

The multicultural communities in the municipality are vibrant and diverse. The multicultural communities value inclusive and affordable community events and activities that celebrate diverse cultures and faiths, a friendly and welcoming community, cultural representation and visibility

in public spaces, accessibility and language support, and affordable community spaces for events.

Overall, the municipality is marked by a dynamic and evolving demographic profile, enriched by a diverse cultural heritage and a growing, multicultural community.

In terms of Victorian Government multicultural policies, organisations and systems, what do you feel is working well for yourself, your community or group?

The City actively engages with the Victorian Government’s multicultural policies, organisations, and systems through various initiatives and collaborative efforts.

The City’s Multicultural Action Plan (MAP) 2018–2022 provided strategic direction to guide Council in delivering inclusive policies, programmes and services that reflect the needs of our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Developed in collaboration with community organisations, agencies and the MAP Advisory Committee, the MAP played a significant role in promoting participation, equity and the celebration of cultural diversity within civic life. While the MAP is due for renewal, and the Advisory Committee is not expected to be reconvened until late 2025, the City remains committed to strengthening its engagement with multicultural communities and building on the achievements of the existing MAP through other projects and activities.

The City actively seeks community feedback to guide the development of its policies and plans. For instance, the Council welcomed feedback from the community, in line with its Community Engagement Policy, to update its Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Council Plan, ensuring it continues to meet and support the needs of the culturally diverse population. This aligns with the Victorian Government’s approach of engaging the broader community in matters relating to social cohesion and multicultural policies.

The City enables inter-agency collaboration, opportunities, linkages, and community partnerships in the implementation of its MAP. This collaborative approach aligns with the Victorian Government’s policy of fostering partnerships and collaboration among various stakeholders to support multicultural communities:

- The City interacts with the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) objectives by engaging with

multicultural and multifaith groups to understand their issues and recommend solutions to policymakers. The VMC also organises events which the City of Greater Geelong seeks to participate in or support.

- The City aligns its initiatives with the Victorian Government's Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division division's objectives by promoting inclusivity, social cohesion, and the health and wellbeing of its multicultural community.
- The City supports multicultural festivals and events such as Pako Festa, however as a local government entity are not eligible to apply for funding under the Victorian Government's Multicultural Festivals and Events Program for City led multicultural initiatives. A local government funding stream would enable further support.

The City is committed to working with multicultural services to achieve positive outcomes for multicultural communities. The City is currently working with Cultura to develop a Staffing MOU which will enable a Multicultural Officer from Cultura to work with City officers to build skills and capability and support improved outcomes for diverse multicultural communities across the region. We hope to have this innovative approach to shared resources and investment in multicultural outcomes in place very soon and will pilot for 12 months. The City is also running the first of a Multicultural Community Leadership program in partnership with Cultura, with Karen and Karenni participants.

Overall, the City's interaction with the Victorian Government's multicultural policies, organisations, and systems is characterised by active participation, collaboration, and alignment with state-level objectives to promote inclusivity, social cohesion, and the wellbeing of multicultural communities.

How can the Victorian Government improve its multicultural policies, organisations and systems, to better promote community harmony and reject division in the context of local and global events?

Drawing on the City 's MAP objectives and outcomes we propose that the Victorian Government could enhance its multicultural policies, organisations, and systems to better promote community harmony and reject division in a local context by focusing on:

- Underpinning all planning and service provision with a focus on inclusivity and equity, ensuring that the diverse needs of the community are met and that all Victorians feel valued and included.
- Building the capacity of multicultural communities. This includes providing support in areas such as employment, education, and leadership, promoting social cohesion.
- Continuing to promote the health and wellbeing of multicultural communities, including on food equity and food security. This involves valuing, respecting, connecting, and enabling people from diverse backgrounds.
- Encouraging collaboration between various agencies, community groups, and advisory committees to address barriers to participation and promote inclusivity. Such groups have played a significant role in advising Council on multicultural affairs and promoting the participation of the multicultural community in civic life.
- Actively seeking feedback from the community to guide the development of multicultural policies and plans is important as local context is critical to empowering local action.

The City urges the Victorian Government to continue its strong, public stance against racism and discrimination. This is critical for promoting social cohesion, educating the public on inclusive actions, and fostering unity. By challenging stereotypes and prejudices, the government ensures equitable treatment for all and strengthens democratic processes.

Addressing the impacts of racism, which affect physical health and life expectancy, is essential. Taking a clear stand against racism and educating the population will help build an inclusive community, benefiting both society and the economy by providing equal opportunities for all Victorians.

By prioritising these areas, the Victorian Government will enhance its multicultural policies, organisations, and systems to effectively promote community harmony and oppose division.

How can the Victorian Government improve its multicultural policies, organisations and systems, to better ensure access to government services for people in multicultural communities?

To better ensure access to government services for people in multicultural communities, the Victorian Government can draw on insights from the City's MAP. This plan highlights key strategies that could also be effectively implemented at the State level.

Firstly, accessibility and language support are crucial. The government should provide translation services in multiple languages across all communication channels and develop resources in community languages. This includes in-language information sessions and employing bicultural workers to bridge the gap between government services and multicultural communities.

Secondly, cultural representation and visibility in public spaces can foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity. This can be achieved through public art, signage in key community languages, and campaigns that celebrate cultural diversity, such as those seen during Harmony Week. These initiatives help to make multicultural communities feel recognised and valued.

Thirdly, the government should focus on inclusive community spaces. Ensuring that community spaces like libraries, neighbourhood houses, sporting clubs, and social clubs are affordable and accessible for community groups to hold events is essential. These spaces provide opportunities for cultural exchange, cultural safety and community building.

Additionally, community engagement and connection are vital. Promoting existing resources, improving access to council services, and providing opportunities for feedback can help ensure that the needs of multicultural communities are met. Funding capacity-building for government staff to increase their cultural competence and confidence in engaging with diverse communities is also important.

Finally, the government should advocate for and support multicultural communities across various sectors, including education, employment, housing, health, and transport. This integrated approach ensures that the fundamental rights and needs of multicultural communities are addressed, promoting their overall well-being and inclusion in society.

These approaches focus on improving access to government services for people in multicultural communities, while fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

How can the Victorian Government improve its multicultural policies, organisations and systems, to better address and prevent racism and discrimination?

Drawing from the City's MAP, we propose that the government consider the following points to better address and prevent racism and discrimination:

- Promoting cultural education and awareness is essential. The government should invest in educational programs that increase awareness of cultural diversity and the contributions of multicultural communities. This includes incorporating multicultural education into school curriculums and providing training for government staff to enhance their cultural competence.
- Enhancing cultural representation and visibility in public spaces can foster a sense of belonging and inclusivity. This can be achieved through public art, signage in key community languages, and campaigns that celebrate cultural diversity, such as those seen during Harmony Week. These initiatives help multicultural communities feel recognised and valued.
- Supporting inclusive community events and activities is crucial. The government should continue to fund and promote events that highlight diverse cultures and faiths, encouraging interaction between community groups. This helps to build mutual understanding and respect.
- Providing accessibility and language support is vital. The government should ensure that all communication channels offer translation services and develop resources in community languages. This includes in-language information sessions and employing bicultural workers to bridge the gap between government services and multicultural communities.
- Advocating for and supporting inclusive access across education, employment, housing, health, and transport enables an integrated approach ensuring that the fundamental rights and needs of multicultural communities are addressed.
- Engaging with multicultural communities to gather feedback and understand their needs is essential. This can be done through regular consultations and creating accessible opportunities for multicultural communities to

provide input on policies and program with regional context.

Finally, strengthening anti-vilification legislation and ensuring robust enforcement can help protect multicultural communities from racism and discrimination. The government can work with local governments to ensure that these laws are effectively communicated and enforced at the local level.

What initiatives or programs do you believe would work best to promote cultural understanding, interfaith dialogue, respect and collaboration within the community to ensure everyone feels included and valued?

Local Government works to meet the needs of all communities within its municipality supporting place-based approaches to responses. We believe that consulting with communities in the development of initiatives or programs to promote cultural understanding, interfaith dialogue, respect, and collaboration is crucial.

Community consultation ensures that initiatives are relevant and effective by addressing the actual needs and concerns of the community. For example, the City's current MAP was developed through extensive community engagement, which helped identify key areas of focus such as employment, education, and social cohesion. This approach ensured that the programs were tailored to the specific cultural and social dynamics of the community.

Engaging with the community fosters trust and a sense of ownership among residents. When people feel that their voices are heard and their input is valued, they are more likely to support and participate in the initiatives. The MAP Advisory Committee played a significant role in advising the Council on multicultural affairs, promoting the participation of the multicultural community in civic life. This collaborative approach helps build stronger, more cohesive communities.

Consultation promotes inclusivity and respect by ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in the decision-making process. This is particularly important in multicultural communities where diverse cultural and religious backgrounds need to be acknowledged and respected.

Community consultation helps identify and address barriers to participation, ensuring that everyone has equal access to the benefits of the initiatives. For instance, the City's efforts to provide promotional materials in multiple languages and organise workshops for direct feedback demonstrate a commitment to overcoming language and cultural barriers.

Interfaith dialogue and cultural engagement are critical for enhancing understanding, fostering empathy, and building stronger relationships across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. This dialogue is essential for promoting mutual respect and addressing complex social issues in increasingly pluralistic societies. In addition to engagement, public communication campaigns and visual representations are necessary to support multiculturalism. The concept that 'you can't be what you can't see' underscores the importance of advertisements, commercials, and billboards that depict cultural diversity in everyday situations.

Consultation ensures that programs have local context. It allows for the incorporation of traditional knowledge and perspectives, which can enhance the cultural competency and relevance of the initiatives. This approach also helps in creating a safe and inclusive environment where community members feel comfortable sharing their insights and concerns.

Engaging with the community in the development of initiatives helps build resilience by empowering individuals and groups to take an active role in shaping their environment. This collaborative approach can lead to more robust and adaptable programs that can better withstand social and economic challenges. Additionally, ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms can ensure continuous improvement. Regular check-ins and impact assessments allow communities to refine programs over time, ensuring they remain effective and responsive to evolving needs.

How can the Victorian Government through its agencies better support and empower multicultural and multifaith communities to contribute to decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs addressed?

The Victorian Government can ensure the voices of multicultural communities are heard and their needs addressed by implementing inclusive and participatory

approaches in policymaking and service delivery, this includes tailored and in-person sessions, materials and information in languages, and enabling groups like Cultura in Geelong to actively engage with the 90+ community groups in our region. This is crucial for fostering social cohesion, promoting equity, and ensuring that everyone feel valued and included. The following are examples drawn from the City's current MAP.

Inclusive Planning and Community Engagement

- The State can adopt comprehensive community consultation processes to gather input from multicultural communities. This involves organising forums, surveys, and focus groups to understand their needs and aspirations. The City's MAP was developed through extensive community engagement, which helped identify key areas of focus such as employment, education, and social cohesion. This approach ensures that policies and programs are tailored to the specific cultural and social dynamics of the community.
- Establishing, or tapping into existing advisory committees or community groups comprising representatives from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds can provide valuable insights and guidance. The MAP Advisory Committee played a significant role in advising the Council on multicultural affairs and promoting the participation of the multicultural community in civic life. The Victorian Government can replicate this model to ensure continuous and structured input from multicultural communities.

Capacity Building and Empowerment

- Invest in leadership programs that empower individuals from multicultural backgrounds to engage in decision-making within their community and in broader civic life. This investment can include training in governance, advocacy, and community organising. The Victorian Government can collaborate with local councils to deliver such programs, enhancing the capacity of multicultural communities to influence policy and direction.
- Providing funding and resources to community organisations that represent multicultural groups can strengthen their ability to advocate for their members. The City has supported various multicultural organisations through grants and partnerships, enabling them to host events and deliver services that meet the needs of their communities. The State can expand these

efforts by offering targeted grants and capacity-building support.

Addressing Barriers to Participation

- Ensuring that information and services are accessible in multiple languages is essential for inclusive participation. The City provides promotional materials in multiple languages and organises workshops to gather direct feedback from non-English speaking residents. The state can implement similar measures ensuring that language barriers do not hinder participation.
- Developing culturally sensitive services that respect and accommodate the diverse needs of multicultural communities is crucial. This includes training public service staff in cultural competency and ensuring services are designed with input from the communities they serve. The state can collaborate with local councils to deliver culturally appropriate health, education, and social services.

The Victorian Government can support multicultural communities by implementing inclusive planning and community engagement, empowering community leaders, addressing barriers to participation, and promoting culturally sensitive services. Inclusive policymaking fosters social cohesion, builds trust, and ensures equitable policies and programs. Empowering multicultural communities enhances their resilience and active contributions to societal solutions.

Can you suggest any improvements to the Victorian Government's approach to supporting multicultural communities?

The Victorian Government can enhance its support for multicultural communities by improving community engagement through collaborative decision-making, providing ongoing cultural competence training for government employees, and expanding multilingual resources. Additionally, increasing funding and capacity-building for multicultural organisations, strengthening anti-discrimination policies, and ensuring culturally sensitive health services are crucial.

The City's engagement with various cultural groups through workshops and surveys for the MAP revision reinforced this approach highlighting the need to:

- Organise and support more inclusive and affordable community events and activities that celebrate diverse cultures and faiths. This includes festivals, cultural events, and neighbourhood gatherings that are open to everyone. We would also highlight the importance of ensuring funding guidelines are clear and responses are timely.
- Foster a friendly and welcoming community and neighbourhoods. This can be achieved by promoting cultural representation and visibility in public spaces.
- Improve accessibility and provision of language support to ensure that all community members can participate fully in community life. This includes providing promotional materials in multiple languages and organising workshops for direct feedback. This requires increased funding to support translation services integrated into government policy broadly.
- Ensure that community spaces are affordable and accessible for community groups to hold events. This helps in creating a safe and inclusive environment where community members feel comfortable sharing their insights and concerns. Could also be addressed by subsidised use of Victorian Government owned assets for community groups, or supporting local government to offer subsidised community rates.
- Promote interfaith dialogue and cultural engagement to enhance understanding, foster empathy, and build stronger relationships across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Funding by the state to support forums, workshops and events that support interfaith dialogue.
- Develop sustainable and inclusive programs by consulting with communities. This allows for the incorporation of traditional knowledge and perspectives, enhancing the cultural competency and relevance of the initiatives.

The Victorian Government has already committed significant resources to support multicultural communities. Here are four additional suggestions based on the current approach:

- Continue to increase funding and resources for programs and initiatives that support multicultural communities.
- Strengthen community engagement by ensuring that the voices of multicultural communities are heard and considered in policy-making processes across all sectors

including education, employment, housing, health, and transport. This can be achieved through regular consultations and feedback mechanisms that leverages local government knowledge and engagement with community.

- Provide more support for multicultural organisations that collaborate directly with communities, including government services. This includes funding, training, and capacity-building initiatives to help these organisations deliver effective services. Funding should cover all costs for activity delivery, monitoring and review.
- Promote multiculturalism across the state by celebrating cultural diversity and encouraging intercultural understanding, strengthening anti-discrimination understanding and policies. This can be done through public campaigns, educational programs, and community events at the local and state level.

By implementing these improvements, the Victorian Government can better support multicultural communities and ensure that everyone has equal access to the benefits of living in a diverse and inclusive society.

Do you have any other feedback from your recent engagement with the Victorian Government on issues impacting you or your community?

The multicultural communities in Greater Geelong face several issues that impact their participation and well-being which we would like to highlight for consideration:

- Multicultural communities often encounter barriers such as lack of accessible information, language, cultural differences, racism, and exclusion. These barriers can hinder their ability to fully participate in community activities and access services. Addressing these barriers needs to consider age, location and economic impacts.
- Feedback from the Greater Geelong community highlights the importance of inclusive and affordable community events, cultural representation in public spaces, and accessibility and language support. These factors are crucial for migrants when choosing to settle and stay in a region.
- The City's MAP identified key areas of focus such as employment, education, and social cohesion. These areas are essential for the integration and well-being of multicultural communities.
- Issues such as a lack of available and affordable housing, traffic congestion, and inadequate public

transport also affect multicultural communities. These challenges can impact their quality of life and ability to access essential services.

- The health and well-being of multicultural communities needs to be a priority. Increased effort is required to ensure inclusive services and programs that respond to the community's needs.

These insights highlight the ongoing efforts and challenges faced by multicultural communities in Greater Geelong. Addressing these issues requires a collaborative approach involving community consultation, inclusive planning, and targeted support services that recognise local context.

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