



NSW Ombudsman Multicultural Plan

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Ombudsman's message

In the spirit of reconciliation, the NSW Ombudsman's Office acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout NSW and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal peoples today.

At the NSW Ombudsman's Office, we aim to be an employer of choice whose workforce is diverse, highly engaged, and capable, and bound together by shared values, purpose and culture. In collaboration with our Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Forum we are implementing a range of Diversity & Inclusion initiatives to promote greater inclusion and support diversity. We are also keen to ensure that members of the public, including people from culturally diverse communities, understand our role, can access our services, and have trust and confidence that we will help.

The aim of this Multicultural Plan is to demonstrate our commitment to people from culturally diverse backgrounds, and to show the actions we are taking to improve our service delivery to culturally diverse communities across NSW and enhance the diversity and inclusivity of our workplace.

1. About the NSW Ombudsman

The NSW Ombudsman is an independent integrity agency that reports directly to the NSW Parliament. We have been handling complaints and investigating maladministration by NSW Government departments and agencies since 1975.

Our jurisdiction has evolved over time, and includes:


- NSW public sector agencies
- NSW local councils
- community service providers funded by NSW Government
- NSW corrective services (including privately managed facilities) and Department of Communities and Justice - Youth Justice
- Statutory bodies established under NSW law, such as NSW public universities.

As a parliamentary ombudsman we seek to safeguard the principles that underpin our democratic system of government: the Rule of Law; fairness, transparency, accountability and integrity in the exercise of public power and the use of public resources; respect for human rights and protection of vulnerable groups within our community.

We do this through handling complaints and conducting investigations, but also monitoring and assessing certain government programs, overseeing the NSW whistleblowing regime, monitoring and assessing NSW Aboriginal Programs, monitoring the operation of the Mandatory Disease Testing Act, conducting inquiries and reviews of systemic issues affecting the public and community sectors, and reviewing the deaths of children in NSW with a view to preventing similar deaths occurring in the future.

We aspire to be a leader in complaint handling, investigations, reviews, and public and community sector monitoring and assessment. We seek to hold the agencies we oversight to account and to make evidence-based recommendations that result in positive change.

Our Values

 <p>Integrity</p>	<p>We are unfailingly ethical and honest. We apply to ourselves the same standards we demand of others.</p>
 <p>Impartiality</p>	<p>We are impartial. We operate independently from government and act in a non-partisan manner. We work only in the public interest.</p>
 <p>Fairness</p>	<p>We treat everyone fairly, and demand that others do the same.</p>
 <p>Transparency</p>	<p>We communicate openly, giving reasons for our decisions. We report publicly wherever possible.</p>
 <p>Professionalism</p>	<p>We achieve excellence through competence and diligence. We act with humility, courtesy and confidence.</p>
 <p>Respect</p>	<p>We respect diversity and promote inclusivity, appreciating the range and worth of human difference.</p>

2. Cultural diversity in NSW

People in NSW are from a wide variety of linguistic, cultural and ancestral backgrounds. There is no single definition of culturally diverse people and communities. However, factors used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other agencies to capture data on cultural diversity include country of birth, main language other than English spoken at home and proficiency in English language. Other relevant indicators are ancestry, religious affiliation, year of arrival in Australia, first language spoken and country of birth of parents.¹ We recognise that these variables may impact on a person's ability to understand laws and processes, access information and services, and resolve issues and complaints.

It is important to recognise that people from culturally diverse backgrounds are not homogenous. There is considerable diversity within and between different cultural groups and some people have bi-cultural or multicultural heritage. In addition, many other factors—such as age, gender, sexuality, education, disability and life experiences, influence each person's identity.



Our community

- 27.6% of the Australian population were born overseas
- 51.5% of Australian residents were born overseas or have a parent born overseas
- 29.3% of the NSW population were born overseas
- 39.4% of the NSW population reported both parents born overseas
- People in NSW have more than 250 ancestries and speak more than 280 languages at home
- The number of people who used a language other than English at home has increased by nearly 800,000 from 2016 to over 5.5 million people. Of this group, 850,000 reported that they do not speak English well or at all.

Australian Bureau of Statistics – [2021 Census data](#)

Some people, including many refugees, face extraordinary challenges settling in a new country. This may include learning a new language, finding employment and accommodation, and learning about laws and administrative processes. This may occur in the context of financial hardship, separation from loved ones and experiences of trauma. Despite these challenges, most people from refugee backgrounds settle very successfully and go on to make significant contributions to their new country.²

During the 10-year period 2012 to 2021, over 740,000 people settled in New South Wales from overseas. This included:

- 52,300 humanitarian entrants
- 237,500 family visa holders
- 450,600 skilled visa holders.

Department of Home Affairs – [Settlement Data](#)

There are many benefits that arise out of a society which is inclusive, connected and socially cohesive. These include:

- greater community health and wellbeing, social and personal security, childhood outcomes, and upward mobility
- improved participation in community life and political engagement
- greater productivity and happier workplaces
- greater creativity and cultural achievement
- a stronger sense of community in local neighbourhoods, and
- more resilient communities in the face of natural or man-made disasters.³

In order for these outcomes to be achieved people from culturally diverse communities need to be respected and valued, have equitable access to public services, and have the knowledge, resources and support to access information, raise issues and make complaints.

3. Multicultural principles





Section 3(1) of the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* outlines the multicultural principles as policy of the State. These principles are:

- (a) all individuals in NSW, irrespective of their linguistic, religious and ancestral backgrounds, should demonstrate a unified commitment to Australia, its interests and future,
- (b) all individuals in New South Wales should recognise the importance of shared values governed by the rule of law within a democratic framework,
- (c) the people of New South Wales are of different linguistic, religious and ancestral backgrounds who, either individually or in community with other members of their respective groups, are free to profess, practise and maintain their own linguistic, religious and ancestral heritage,
- (d) all individuals and institutions should respect and make provision for the culture, language and religion of others within an Australian legal and institutional framework where English is the common language,
- (e) all individuals in New South Wales should have the greatest possible opportunity to:
 - (i) contribute to, and participate in, all aspects of public life in which they may legally participate, and
 - (ii) make use of, and participate in, relevant activities and programs provided or administered by the Government of New South Wales
- (f) all institutions of New South Wales should recognise the linguistic and cultural assets in the population of New South Wales as a valuable resource and promote this resource to maximise the development of the State.

The Act requires each public authority to observe the multicultural principles in conducting its affairs, and the head of each public authority to implement the principles within the area of his or her administration.⁴

The Multicultural Policies and Services Program (MPSP) is the mechanism for agencies to show how they are planning effectively for people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and to report on progress. The MPSP Framework consists of four focus areas and nine outcomes in which agencies are expected to develop a set of specific targets.⁵

The MPSP Framework

 <p>Service delivery</p>	Mainstream services for everyone
	Targeted programs to fill the gaps
	People from culturally diverse backgrounds are aware of NSW Government (funded) services, programs and functions
 <p>Planning</p>	Strong plans to deliver services
	Evidence driven planning
 <p>Leadership</p>	Demonstrated leadership in culturally inclusive practices
	Increased recognition of the value of cultural diversity
 <p>Engagement</p>	Collaboration with diverse communities
	Understanding the needs of people from diverse backgrounds

4. Our commitment to people from culturally diverse backgrounds

The Ombudsman offers a mechanism that can help to redress the imbalance of power between individuals and government agencies and service providers. Because that imbalance tends to be greatest where a person is already in a position of vulnerability, much of our complaint-handling work will naturally be focused on vulnerable individuals and communities.

The NSW community includes Aboriginal people, people whose forebears or families have come from other countries but who have lived in Australia for much, if not all of their life, and those who have arrived from overseas more recently.

Due to the unique experiences of Aboriginal people and communities in NSW, and their different needs (for example, in relation to healing, and revitalising, reclaiming and maintaining traditional languages) this Multicultural Plan is not intended to address NSW Ombudsman priorities, plans and programs to better meet the needs of Aboriginal people. The work we are doing in this space is led by our Deputy Ombudsman, Aboriginal Programs and includes:

- the establishment of the Aboriginal Programs Branch
- monitoring of designated Aboriginal programs (the NSW Government Aboriginal affairs program – OCHRE)
- provision of, and engagement in, Aboriginal cultural competency training
- development of a Reconciliation Action Plan
- engaging with Aboriginal communities and service providers.

While not specifically directed to meeting the needs of Aboriginal people and communities, we hope that the initiatives and actions outlined in this plan will improve our service delivery to Aboriginal people and the broader NSW community, as well as culturally diverse people and communities.

5. Our workforce profile

Diverse and inclusive workplaces benefit from improved performance and productivity, more innovative problem solving, greater employee attraction and retention, and better customer service.

At the Ombudsman we are committed to fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace culture that embraces, values and represents the many communities, places and perspectives of the people we serve.

	Number of Staff	Percentage of Staff
Total number of staff	195	100%
Women	152	78.0%
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People	9	4.62%
People whose first language spoken as a child was not English	48	24.62%
People with disability	16	8.21%
People born overseas	64	32.82%

As at June 2023.

6. Our work with culturally diverse people and communities

It is important that community members and service providers understand our role and functions, find our services accessible and that we meet the needs of those who contact us. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic impacting our ability to engage in-person with communities through outreach activities, we continued to build relationships with stakeholders, improve access to information about services and improve the way we work with people from diverse backgrounds through 2021-22. For example, in 2021-22 we:

- delivered tailored information sessions about our services for newly arrived migrants and refugees at the Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency
- provided training about our role and functions for staff at the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association, to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to support their clients from migrant and refugee backgrounds access our services and to make complaints
- we are developing a Language Services Guidelines to ensure staff communicate effectively with people from culturally diverse communities
- commenced distribution of our new translated fact sheets
- continued to ensure people who contact our office have access to an interpreter through the Telephone Interpreting Service and continue to work with Multicultural NSW about improvements to our language services
- participated in 18 interagency meetings with services that support people from a multicultural background, including recently arrived migrants and refugees
- continue to build staff capability through the SBS Inclusion Program, which all staff are required to complete
- continued to collaborate and strengthen our relationships with various networks and organisations supporting migrants and refugees, including Multicultural NSW, NSW Multicultural Advisory Forum and the Refugee Support Network.

7. Our multicultural plan priorities

In 2022-24 we plan to undertake a range of activities to enhance our staff diversity, develop a more inclusive workplace and improve the way we work with people from culturally diverse backgrounds. In particular, we undertake to do the following:

Initiative	2022-24 Actions	MSPS Framework focus area
Promote our 2022-24 Multicultural Plan to community members and staff.	Publish the 2022-24 Multicultural Action Plan on our website and intranet.	Leadership
	Ensure we review and update our Action Plan annually, and update the Multicultural Plan as required.	Leadership
Ensure the Executive monitor the delivery of projected outcomes in our Multicultural Plan Action Plan.	Ensure the Executive and the Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Forum monitor the delivery of projected outcomes in our Diversity and Inclusion Framework and in our Multicultural Plan.	Leadership and Planning
Enhance the diversity of staff in our workplace.	We will develop a workforce strategy that incorporates diversity and inclusion initiatives, supported by guidance and support materials for inclusive recruitment practices.	Leadership
Foster a more inclusive culture and increase the visibility of cultural diversity within our organisation.	Identify and celebrate, within our office, events that recognise cultural diversity and other days of religious and cultural significance.	Leadership and Engagement
	Include and promote at staff events, in our calendar of events, staff newsletters and on our social media platforms to recognise cultural diversity in our office.	Leadership and Engagement
	Provide opportunities for staff to share and exchange their cultural stories and experiences through facilitated office events or in our staff newsletters.	Leadership and Engagement
	Hold information stalls and encourage staff participation at community events that recognise cultural diversity.	Service Delivery and Engagement

Initiative	2022-24 Actions	MSPS Framework focus area
Build cultural capability of employees to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to effectively engage with culturally and linguistically diverse people and communities.	Ensure that all new staff complete Diversity and Inclusion training within 12 months. Track staff completion rates of the Diversity and Inclusion training.	Leadership and Engagement
	Finalise and promote to staff our new 'Operating Procedures to Support Staff Work Effectively with People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds'.	Service Delivery and Engagement
	Finalise our new Language Services Guidelines and ensure it is accessible to staff on our intranet.	Service Delivery and Engagement
In collaboration with our Diversity Inclusion and Advisory Forum, implement a range of D&I initiatives to promote greater inclusion and support diversity.	Develop a Reconciliation Action Plan.	Leadership
	Improve the capture of data for culturally diverse employees through proactively encouraging employees to disclose their status. Use this information to inform the development of relevant policies and practices for this group.	Leadership
Use existing demographic datasets to inform our outreach activities and better tailor them to the needs of specific communities.	Analyse the Department of Home Affairs settlement data reports, our internal analytics dashboard, and Australian Bureau of Statistics data to identify and target settlement locations where there are high populations of refugees and other new and emerging communities.	Planning and Engagement
	Develop quarterly visit schedules to communities where there are high populations of newly arrived refugees and migrants.	Planning and Engagement
Improve planning and service provision at all levels through data analysis and consultation with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.	Analyse and utilise feedback in training evaluations for continual improvement to the delivery of our services to people from culturally diverse backgrounds.	Service Delivery and Engagement
	Review the way we collect information from people who contact our office from culturally diverse backgrounds. Seek advice about how we can sensitively and effectively improve how we collect such information and use this information to improve our services.	Leadership and Planning

Initiative	2022-24 Actions	MSPS Framework focus area
	Proactively engage with the Community Engagement team at Multicultural NSW to identify outreach opportunities with culturally diverse communities and to improve the delivery of our services to this group.	Leadership and Planning
Ensure the delivery of effective and efficient language services to ensure we are accessible for people who prefer or need to communicate in a language other than English.	Monitor our translation and interpreter tracking register on a quarterly basis to ensure we are identifying the language service needs of people who contact our office.	Leadership and Planning
	Review and update our register of employees qualified under the Community Language Allowance Scheme (CLAS), as well as employees covered by CLAS to use AUSLAN.	Leadership and Planning
	Support relevant staff undertake the CLAS examination so they can provide on-the-spot language assistance in the workplace.	Leadership, Service Delivery and Planning
	Continue to consult with Multicultural NSW about improvements to our Language Services, including our telephone and interpreting service. Communicate outcomes to Complaints and Resolution Branch.	Service Delivery and Engagement
Improve processes for the collection and analysis of data received from culturally diverse contacts to our office and use this information for continual improvement to the delivery of our services to this group.	Continue to review and upgrade our complaints data base to ensure we capture demographic variables that will improve service delivery to culturally diverse people and communities.	Leadership and Service Delivery
	<p>Maintain an issue register of new and emerging issues for culturally diverse people and communities.</p> <p>Provide updates of new and emerging issues to relevant staff.</p>	Planning and Engagement
Improve website accessibility for people with poor English proficiency.	Continue to progress upgrades to our website to ensure all people have equity of access.	Leadership and Service Delivery
	Monitor website readability and accessibility to ensure it is aligned with our website content strategy and multicultural plan.	Leadership and Service Delivery

Initiative	2022-24 Actions	MSPS Framework focus area
Ensure people from culturally diverse backgrounds are aware of our services and of their right to make a complaint.	Continue to distribute via our networks our information in easy read and in other languages.	Service Delivery and Engagement
	Deliver tailored information sessions about our role and functions to newly arrived migrants and refugees and promote the training on our social media platforms.	Service Delivery and Engagement
Continue to build and strengthen partnerships between peak bodies and local agencies that support people from culturally diverse backgrounds.	Continue to map and participate in relevant interagency meetings and seek opportunities to partner with key stakeholders.	Planning and Engagement
	Proactively engage religious and community leaders to ensure they are aware of our services and better equipped to support newly arrived migrants and refugees make complaints to our office.	Engagement and Service Delivery
	Participate in the Multicultural NSW Regional Engagement Program to increase engagement with new and emerging communities, young people, Indigenous communities and cultural community leaders across regional areas of the state.	Service Delivery and Engagement
Utilise a variety of communications strategies to raise awareness of our services.	Develop targeted social media campaigns to inform people from culturally diverse backgrounds and staff at the services that support them, of our role and functions and how to make complaints.	Service Delivery and Engagement
	Develop a Communication Strategy for communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse cohorts. Include an initiative in the strategy to target this cohort via ethnic radio programs.	Service Delivery and Engagement

8. Legislative and policy context

This NSW Ombudsman Multicultural Plan is informed by a range of legislation and policies, as well as the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*, including:

Commonwealth legislation

Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Racial Discrimination Act 1975

NSW legislation

Anti-Discrimination Act 1977

Carers (Recognition) Act 2010

Disability Inclusion Act 2014

Government Sector Employment Act 2013

Government Sector Employment Regulation 2014

Government Sector Employment (General) Rules 2014

Ombudsman Act 1974

Policies and other materials

Multicultural NSW - NSW Multicultural Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Public Service Commission, Positive and Productive Workplaces Guideline

NSW Ombudsman, Diversity and Inclusion Framework

NSW Ombudsman, Community Engagement Strategy

NSW Ombudsman, Code of Ethics and Conduct

Endnotes

- ¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity, 1999, <[1289.0 - Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity, 1999 \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/abs/1289.0)>.
- ² Refugee Council of Australia, *Humanitarian Entrants in New South Wales: A resource for New South Wales government agencies*, 14.
- ³ Multicultural NSW, *Community Relations Report 2018-2019*, 9.
- ⁴ *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*, s 3(4)-(5).
- ⁵ Multicultural NSW, *Multicultural Policies and Services Program*, 2016.