

**CANBERRA MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY FORUM Inc.
(CMCF)
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**Response Paper
to
Draft ACT MULTICULTURAL STRATEGY 2006-2009**

CMCF is the ACT multicultural peak body, established in December 2005 in response to many likeminded Canberra's Multicultural communities plea echoed at the December 2005 Multicultural Summit, to move forward and have a unified voice in the form of a responsive peak organisation that is independent, truly inclusive and can foster the spirit of cooperation and harmonious relationship amongst the multicultural communities in Canberra.

The ACT Government released the draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009 for community comments. The Multicultural Strategy is the result of the culmination of Ministerial Multicultural consultations through forums and the Multicultural Summit. The draft strategy clusters the many issues raised by the community under ten themes and the ACT Government's position in response to these issues.

CMCF welcomes the Government's invitation to comment on the draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009 and encourages all community groups to provide feedback to ensure their views are incorporated in the new strategy that will guide the government and the community in multicultural affairs over the next three years.

The draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009

1. Structure of the document

- 1.1 The draft strategy sets out overarching principles to underpin Government programs and policies that spell out individual rights and responsibilities.
- 1.2 While the draft document has been labelled as "Strategy", it does not contain specific plans, actions, or resources, and reads more like an overarching framework.
- 1.3 The ACT community needs to know "how" these important issues will be tackled and that there are identified actions clearly demonstrate the government's commitment to either "support it", "fix it", "stop it", "pay for it", and/or "act on it".

2. Content of the document

2.1 Introduction

CMCF suggests the re-drafting of the Introduction section:

- 2.1.1 The definition of multiculturalism needs to be redefined to reflect a multicultural ACT that the Minister assured at the Summit.

2.1.2 Multiculturalism exemplifies an ethic of acceptance of and respect for cultural diversity, community harmony and inclusiveness. It is an aspect of the ACT society that needs to be celebrated, embraced, promoted and supported.

2.1.3 The ten themes should be broadened to reflect the broad issues, for example, the focus should be on communication policy, not just language policy, and ageing issues not just aged care, migration and family reunion, not just parents.

2.2. The proposed strategy's aims

CMCF has concerns that the proposed aims of the development of ACT Multicultural Strategy shows a lack of connectedness to the set of principles underpinning the proposed strategies. In addition, the emphasis on “managing cultural diversity” is highly inappropriate, the emphasis should be to “support” or “embrace” diversity. The aims should reflect:

- the government’s strong commitment to reaffirm the fundamental principles of multiculturalism and this should be reflected throughout the key themes and include principles such as unity in diversity, community harmony, access and equity and social justice;
- on embracing the principles of unity in diversity and respect, the word “managing cultural diversity” – are definitely not preferred choice of words in this document. “embracing”, “promoting” and “supporting” would better portray the ACT Government’s commitment.
- the overarching principles set out to underpin programs and policies should also spell out individual rights and responsibilities including the government’s commitment;
- programs should be developed in full consultation with the community with a strong emphasis of supporting cultural diversity, encourage greater awareness and understanding of cultures and its contributions to Australian society;
- services and programs are designed and operated competently to ensure equal access and are culturally appropriate;
- programs designed to encourage new and emerging communities to become self reliant more quickly and develop effective communication strategies;
- the whole of government approach in developing appropriate reporting mechanisms to ensure consistency and accountability and responsibility in its commitment to cultural diversity in the ACT.

2.3 Underpinning Principles

CMCF agreed that the document, along with the Government’s commitment to the ACT Human Rights Act is a strong indicator of continuing support for multiculturalism in the ACT.

However, the CMCF noted that the document only outlines the rights and responsibilities for individuals without identifying rights or responsibilities for organisations or the Government.

The document needs to clearly identify the responsibility of all stakeholders including the individual, organisations and government bodies and agencies.

CMCF suggests re-wording the following statements:

- 2.3.1 The right to “express” one’s own culture, language and religion (combining dot points 1,2,3);
- 2.3.2 The obligation brings responsibility to accept the rights of others to practise their own beliefs;
- 2.3.3. The right to the availability of equality of treatment and access to services to the whole of the community (to ensure equal access to all programs);
- 2.3.4 The right to participate in, and to contribute to, the social, cultural, economic “and all aspects” of community life.
- 2.3.5 The obligation brings responsibility to “treat each other” in a fair and respectful manner;

3. General Comments on the Key themes

The Key Themes and Defining the ACT Government’s position

CMCF suggests that heading of “ACT Government Position ” is changed to “ACT Government Strategy” or “Action”.

The paper needs further refinement to develop a strategic framework that will:

- define the Government’s role in addressing the identified issues, rather than providing a response;
- demonstrate the Government’s commitment by identifying how it will engage the community to tackle the issues, through specific activities;
- identify which Government Department will take lead responsibility;
- clearly set out when the ACT Government will work with the Federal Government, multicultural groups, the peak multicultural representative body and/or the general public;
- include key performance indicators / measures that the community could monitor, report and provide feedback to Government on how well they have performed;
- include how these performance indicators and the success of the strategy/framework will be evaluated; and
- define the type of approach taken and time frame for each area of activity.

4. Theme 1 – Human rights

Issues raised by the community:

- 4.1 To reflect the whole of community-
‘..Protect the fundamental rights of asylum seekers, migrants and refugees should also include “..and community in general”.

The ACT Government Strategy to consider:

- 4.2 CMCF recommends a more definite approach including the ACT Government’s commitment to support Human Rights education programs that aims to increase awareness and understanding of the basic human rights principles.

5. Theme 2 – Access and equity

Issues raised by the community:

- 5.1 “Access and equity” is not simply based on language barrier, it is also related to the service providers who are culturally incompetent to deliver culturally appropriate services and are unable to understand the specific needs of individuals regardless of their background. Therefore, the information under this issue needs to be significantly broadened.
- 5.2 Access to health care and employment are key issues. However, there were a broader range of issues under this key theme that were identified at the summit and these need to be included and addressed in the area of Government Strategy. They include education, community services, government services, and a range of other services.
- 5.3 The community identified difficulties in accessing appropriate health care services and facilities. Appropriate health professionals are not just restricted to “medical type”. CMCF suggests the word “medical” be replaced with “health” to cover the broader context of health care.
- 5.4 Accessing services with the assistance of appropriately trained interpreter services has become increasingly difficult and should be considered as a top priority in the Government’s strategy of action plan.
- 5.5 Please explain / define clearly the Government’s position in engaging “ broader membership” of the multicultural community.

The Government’s strategy to consider:

- 5.6 What are the Government’s measures for achieving “access and equity”?
- 5.7 Building community capability to disseminate information that is comprehensible to own community and encourage the community to participate in translating information into their own language other than English.
- 5.8 Besides translation, how is cultural appropriateness of services going to be achieved?

- 5.9 CMCF acknowledges the need to identify specific issues relating to employment and workplace issues with limited language comprehension skill. However this focus should be broadened to include other aspects such as social support, counselling services for new migrants, career support, education support and services to help employers.
- 5.10 Other areas, such as education, skills training programs and government services need to be addressed.

6. Theme 3 – Aged care issues

CMCF suggests changing the title to a more positive focus, such as “Ageing and Aged care services”.

CMCF highlighted the following issues raised by the community that require priority consideration:

- 6.1 Current focus is far too narrow, the emphasis needs to be on health care and community care, including social and community support, not just residential care.
- 6.2 Encouraging healthy lifestyle, through supporting social participation, physical activity, access to health services and provision of counselling and information should be included.
- 6.3 In discussing community care, transport, home help and culturally appropriate meals services need to be addressed. Community issues highlighted transport barriers pertaining to -
- ability to drive and license issues;
 - accessibility of public transport;
 - access HACC transport services.
- 6.4 The issues and needs of carers and families need to be included.

The Government’s Strategy to consider:

- 6.5 CMCF identifies Ageing as a vital issue for multicultural communities, the government’s approach should focus on more than just aged care. It is not just about providing care to those who are frail, it is also about helping older people to stay healthy for longer, and plan for ageing gracefully. As well as supporting carers and families in that caring role to help people stay at home for longer.
- 6.6 Many of the broader areas can and should be addressed under the joint Commonwealth and ACT Government Home and Community Care program, and making culturally appropriate services a priority would go a long way to addressing these issues.
- 6.7 The aged care issues are also about, supporting carers, better health care throughout life, promoting healthy lifestyles, social activities for elderly who are socially isolated and providing care to help people to stay at home for longer. (Refer to Federal Government’s Aged care policy –The Way Forward”.)

- 6.8 CMCF recommends the Government to facilitate a Positive Ageing Forum seeking multicultural community's view on current issues concerning ageing, aged care services, health, wellbeing and accessibility.

7. Theme 4 – Cultural and Religious Acceptance

Cultural acceptance has again been defined too narrowly. The issues discussed at the summit were much broader than negative political climate and marginalisation.

Issues raised by the community:

- 7.1 The issues included negative portrayal of multiculturalism in the media; religious and cultural acceptance by government and business; the role of interfaith and cultural education activities; the role of settlement services; cross cultural education; and celebration of culture, including language, music, art, food, religion, and way of life.
- 7.2 CMCF echoed concerns about the lack of perception that a section of the broader community still harbours a lack of respect and understanding towards minor sections of the community.
- 7.3 Despite many achievements, the concept of multiculturalism continues to be challenged in practice. For example, the marginalisation, isolation and racism directed at Muslims as portrayed in the media in the 2005 Sydney riots. Programs and strategies should be developed to overcome and counter such attitudes and policy.

The Government Strategy to consider:

- 7.4 CMCF recommends that including in the ACT Government Strategy a commitment for new initiatives to embrace multiculturalism through:
- interfaith dialogue programs;
 - education programs, including the involvement of schools curriculum;
 - other awareness activities.

8. Theme 5 – Language Policy

CMCF recommends that the heading of this theme be changed to “Communication” Policy.

CMCF identified that part of language policy should be expanded and include effective communication strategies relating to a commitment of:

- 8.1 The provision of adequate interpreting services especially relating to health care and government services.
- 8.2 Building community capability to assist with the dissemination of community information in the language that is understood by the community other than English.

- 8.3 Examination of communication messages and channels not just a focus on translation. For example, looking at the cultural sensitivities for on-line services.
- 8.4 The Government's support and continuing funding of the multicultural community special radio broadcasting programs.
- 8.5 The Government continue its effort to provide funding to support Ethnic Language programs.
- 8.6 The Government continue to encourage the study of second language other than English as part of the ACT school curriculum.

9. Theme 6 - Leadership and Governance

Issues raised by community:

- 9.1 The multicultural communities took up the Minister's challenge and established the new ACT Multicultural peak body, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) in recognising the need that the multicultural communities requires a leading organisation that is independent, transparent and inclusive and accountable to its members and community as a whole.

ACT Government strategy to consider:

- 9.2 CMCF recommends the Government to develop contractual arrangement with CMCF with adequate funding and resources to ensure the communities have an identified, reputable and accountable peak organisation, representing an unified voice for the Canberra multicultural community and promote community harmony.
- 9.3 CMCF welcomes the government's commitment to provide opportunities for Canberra's multicultural community groups to develop leadership and governance skills.
- 9.4 CMCF recommends the Government explore affordable public liability insurance to protect and enable the multicultural community to provide much needed social support activities for their own community.

10. Theme 7 – Migration and Parents

Issues raised by the community:

CMCF recommends the heading of the theme be changed to include "Family Reunion" to focus on family rather than just parents.

- 10.1 The issues identified the need to gain better understanding of the migration regulation and requirements in the area of family reunion.

ACT Government Strategy to consider:

- 10.2 CMCF recommends the government to liaise with the Australian Government to provide information services to assist community needs.

- 10.3 CMCF recommends the government to provide support services to families that are unsuccessful in their application under the family reunion program to ensure the community understands the rationale for the refusal of visa entries.

11. Theme 8 – Settlement services for Newly Arrived Migrants

- 11.1 CMCF recommends the government ensure adequate funding is committed to support the programs conducted through the Migrant Resource Centre for the benefits of the new migrants.
- 11.2 CMCF recommends the government provide information services and support programs to ensure newly arrived business, skilled and professional migrants are welcome to settle in Canberra and make contribution to the culture and economic growth.
- 11.3 CMCF recommends the government provide appropriate bilingual counselling services accessible to newly settled migrants.

12. Theme 9 - Terrorism

CMCF suggests the theme under this heading is too narrowly focused. Broader issues including crime, punishment, and community safety were discussed at the Summit and would need to be addressed here. For example, there was some discussion about linkages between settlement services and crime; racial violence; gender based violence transferred from country of origin; trauma as well as terrorism.

CMCF suggests this heading be changed to “Safety in the Community”.

Issues raised by the community

- 12.1 CMCF recognises that many community groups have expressed concerns of the perception that the anti-terrorism legislation is aimed at one particular group, i.e. the Muslim community. That this legislation potentially threatens the human rights of particular communities; and the imprisonment of asylum seekers in immigration detention centres around Australia. Furthermore, there is growing concern about international terrorism and its implications affecting the influence on community cohesion.
- 12.2 CMCF also recognises that the community has expressed concerns about crime and violence in the community and the lack of reporting of domestic violence to authority amongst the multicultural communities.
- 12.3 CMCF recognises that for the community to feel safe and secure, the community needs to work on initiatives to build closer working relationships with the police and provide appropriate programs particularly related to community safety, home security and crime prevention to multicultural community.

ACT Government strategy to consider:

CMCF suggests the Government strategy needs to address the broader issues of crime, community safety and terrorism. In doing so it needs to say how different areas

will work together, such as AFP and community groups or Federal and Territory Government. Specific actions by the Government will need to be set out to discourage such practices and allay fears.

- 12.4 CMCF recommends the Government to make continuous efforts to liberalise policies and provide appropriate programs to defuse tension and allay community fears.
- 12.5 CMCF recommends the Government to support CMCF's initiative to establish multicultural community police interface committees to develop strategies to promote better community interface between the multicultural community and the police.

13. Theme 10 – Young people

The document quotes “the child’s right” but fails to qualify the needs of youth and young adults as separate groups.

CMCF suggests that this theme needs to cover all areas, such as education which was discussed in depth at the Summit, and should also make efforts to focus on specific actions and the role of youth, youth at risk issues, youth services, multicultural services, the community and the Government at all levels etc.

Issues raised by the community:

- 13.1 CMCF recognises the issues raised in this paper are general and touches broad aspects of issues facing the multicultural youth such as employment issues, social interaction and generation gap caused by cultural conflict.
- 13.2 CMCF recognises the lack of involvement and the lack of programs that attract multicultural youth involvements.
- 13.3 CMCF recognises the concerns facing the youth at risk and the lack of supportive programs to assist multicultural youth and new migrants in gaining appropriate employment opportunity and the integration into Australian society.

ACT Government Strategy to consider:

- 13.4 CMCF proposes the Government to fund research project to analyse multicultural youth issues and their specific needs for the next three years;
- 13.5 CMCF recognises the enthusiasm to create a multicultural youth body to provide advocacy for young people and to work with the government to develop and implement youth policies.
- 13.6 CMCF recommends the Government to facilitate a Multicultural Youth Summit, seeking the young people’s view on current issues affecting the youth and the kind of services required and the contribution that the young people could identified make Canberra a better place to work and enjoy life.

14. Monitoring and Reporting mechanism

To ensure appropriate monitoring and reporting mechanism is put in place, CMCF recommends that

- 14.1 The ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009 must obtain endorsement at the highest government level and obtain bi-partisan support from all members of the Legislative Assembly.
- 14.2 The ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009 is launched officially and fully endorsed by all ACT Government agencies and that multicultural Strategic implementations plan is put in place as part of the agency's learning and Development framework.
- 14.3 All Government agencies provide key measurable indicators within a certain time frame as part of commitment to promoting multiculturalism and unity in diversity initiatives.
- 14.4 The Government identified the ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs be the lead department to liaise with all agencies to ensure the ACT Government Agencies develop annual Action plans and report against these actions in their respective departmental annual reports.
- 14.5 The ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs to circulate the multicultural community feedback to all agencies identifying achievements and areas of improvements throughout the implementation phase.
- 14.6 CMCF, as the peak ACT multicultural body, act as conduit between communities to provide feedback to government about implementation through:
 - General meeting forums
 - Website publications
- 14.7 The Government sets up an award program to recognise agencies achievement in promoting unity in diversity in the workplace.
- 14.8 Develop a regular community review mechanism by individual government agencies as part of community feedback program to gauge the success in the implementation of the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009. For example, health care services, housing services.

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Endorsed by
Canberra Multicultural Community Forum
The Interim Committee
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