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Multicultural Access and Equity  
Action Plan

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**2016 to 18**

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## Our Office

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The planned outcome of the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (the Office) is fair and accountable administrative action by Australian Government entities and prescribed private sector organisations, by investigating complaints, reviewing administrative action and statutory compliance inspections and reporting.

The purpose of the Office is to:

- provide *assurance* that the Australian Government entities and prescribed private sector organisations that the Office oversees, act with *integrity* and treat people fairly, and
- *influence* enduring systemic *improvement* in public administration in Australia and the region.

The Office safeguards the community in its dealings with Australian Government entities and *prescribed* private sector organisations that it oversees by:

- Conducting investigations into the administrative actions of Australian Government officials, agencies and their service providers upon receipt of complaints from individuals, groups or organisations. The role also includes investigating the actions of registered private providers of training for overseas students, VET student loan providers, registered private postal operators and private health insurers.
- On the Ombudsman's own initiative, conducting investigations into the administrative actions of Australian Government agencies, registered private providers of training for overseas students, VET student loan providers, registered private postal operators and private health insurance providers. These investigations often arise from insights gained through handling individual complaints and our other oversight responsibilities.
- Reporting to the Immigration Minister on the detention arrangements for people in immigration detention for two years or more (and on a six-monthly basis thereafter). The Immigration Ombudsman also oversees immigration detention facilities through a program of regular announced and unannounced visits to detention centres.
- assisting people to resolve complaints, and developing policies and principles for accountability.

Our work has the potential to affect all members of the Australian community including culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community members. This can be directly through our complaints services or indirectly through the recommendations we make for improvements in public administration and private industry practices, as well as the budgeting, finance, procurement and contracting decisions we make.

## *Our Multicultural Access and Equity Vision*

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Our vision is to safeguard the community in its dealings with the Australian Government departments/agencies and prescribed private sector organisations that we oversight, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) members of the community.

We aim to provide services that are accessible to and inclusive of all members of the community and incorporate cultural diversity principles into the way we work across our office.

### OUR PLAN



Our multicultural access and equity plan was developed by our Inclusion Committee (IC) in consultation with staff across the Office. The Deputy Ombudsman as the Chair of the IC has overall responsibility for overseeing the plan's implementation.

### Considerations

A person's cultural background may be constituted not just by their country of birth and/or their main language spoken, but a range of other aspects including their ancestry, citizenship, ethno-religiosity and faith.

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## The Australian Government Multicultural Access and Equity Policy

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*The Multicultural Access and Equity Policy is about ensuring that Australian Government programmes and services meet the needs of all Australians, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.*

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

*Australian Government departments and agencies are responsible for applying these commitments to their work so that Australians of all backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, our society.*

**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.

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## Our Actions

### Commitment 1: Leadership

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

Item	Action	Timeline	Target
1.1	Commit to multicultural access and equity goals and actions in an Office Multicultural Access & Equity Plan.	30 September 2017	Plan published for the Office.
1.2	The Office's commitment to multicultural access and equity is evident in key corporate documents such as corporate plans and client service charters, by incorporating statements or guidance as appropriate.	Ongoing as documents are updated	Key corporate documents (as agreed/approved by SLG) link into the Office's commitment to multicultural access and equity.
1.3	Executive Accountability Assign a Senior Executive Officer to be a dedicated point of leadership for multicultural access and equity implementation.	Already in place - ongoing	Senior Executive Officer assigned for the entire period.
1.4	Have an internal committee to monitor delivery of multicultural access and equity activities and ensure the Office promotes awareness of and adherence to access and equity principles to staff via: Harmony Day, the Office's support of the AHRC's anti-racism campaign 'Racism. It Stops with me', all staff meeting presentations; Inclusion Committee intranet page, and cultural and Indigenous awareness training throughout the year.	Already in place - Ongoing	70 per cent of actions listed in OCO Multicultural Access & Equity Plan delivered and a minimum of four events/presentations/training programs are conducted throughout the year (12 month period)
1.5	Publish on the intranet an internal network of contact officers to help identify and respond to multicultural access and equity concerns.	Ongoing	Agreement by IC members sought. Intranet updated with agreed contact officers.

## Our Actions

### Commitment 2: Engagement

Identify and strategically engage with CALD clients, stakeholders and communities

Item	Action	Timeline	Target
2.1	Provide staff with guidelines about when and how to use translating and interpreting services (TIS).	Ongoing	Staff are aware of the guidance documents and policies published by the Office.  Intranet documents are reviewed annually.  TIS training opportunities are provided annually.
2.2	Have a priority language list that defines the languages to be selected when translating information products.  Ensure main communication products are translated into those languages using easy English.	December 2017	Priority language list for the Office is reviewed annually.  Documents published in other languages reviewed annually to ensure currency and availability.
2.3	Consult multicultural communities about: the Office's draft communication materials and intended communications methods; and their experience engaging with our Office. Maintain, or have access to, a forum to engage with representatives of multicultural communities.  Refer to existing consultation undertaken by Office and/or approach FECCA to engage with CALD communities to gather feedback on our services.	March 2018	Publish information and a common set of guidelines and templates for communicating and engaging with CALD communities on the Office's intranet that include the use of multicultural media.

## Our Actions

### Commitment 3: Responsiveness

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

Item	Action	Timeline	Target
3.1	<p>Budgeting considerations (procurement activities and/or partnership/contract/grant agreements) by the Office to incorporate costs associated with language services.</p> <p>Internal templates (for example outreach, budgeting engagement), to include clauses specifying multicultural access and equity accountabilities, such as the provision of appropriate translating and interpreting services and the collection of CALD data and equity costs.</p>	Dec 2017	Update relevant costing/budgeting templates to incorporate access and equity costs considerations.
3.2	Include multicultural access and equity considerations in any whole-of-government standards or guides (for example, complaint handling guides) published by the Office.	Dec 2017 - ongoing	Update project plan template to note that any whole-of-government standards or guides being produced must include multicultural access and equity considerations.
3.3	Include representatives from diverse communities on advisory bodies, reference groups and working groups (i.e. Commonwealth Complaint Handling Forum).	Ongoing	Invite FECCA to join any advisory groups we establish/lead.

## Our Actions

### Commitment 4: Performance

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

Item	Action	Timeline	Target
4.1	Develop feedback mechanisms that allow clients with CALD backgrounds, including those with limited or no English language skills, to provide their views on policies, programs and services. Refer also to commitment 6.4.	April 2018	Increased data regarding CALD community feedback on the Office's performance.
4.2	Conduct annual analysis of CALD statistics (staff and complainants so far as available) to inform the Office's strategy to continuously improve on how it manages its operations and ensure that CALD communities are appropriately considered in the implementation of any new functions of the Office.	June 2018	Regular reporting to the SLG and IC for consideration and discussion.
4.3	Internal recognition of strong multicultural access and equity performance.	December 2018	Recognition/update of good practice/s re multicultural access and equity at a minimum of one all-staff meeting during the year.
4.4	Update templates relevant to when the Office commissions research (for example, surveys), to ensure that data collected can be disaggregated by cultural and linguistic diversity.	March 2018	Increased CALD data for the Office.

## Our Actions

### Commitment 5: Capability

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

Item	Action	Timeline	Target
5.1	Review what data the Office currently collects on the cultural and linguistic diversity of our clients and determine whether this is sufficient. Initiate Business Improvement Analysis if determined required.	July 2018	Business analysis conducted. <b>Stage 1</b> – internal review conducted. <b>Stage 2</b> – pending outcome of Stage 1, initiate project with subject matter expert.
5.2	Review relevant policies to determine whether changes can be made to increase the recruitment and retention of staff from CALD backgrounds.	June 2018	Recruitment policy updated.
5.3	Provide opportunities for staff to undertake cultural diversity awareness training.	Ongoing	Promote the training available on LearnHub to staff at least twice a year.  Following a review of the Office's needs, determine whether or not cultural diversity training other than LearnHub is made available to staff annually.
5.4	Maintain a register of staff diversity and personal language skills.	July 2018	Report on diversity data we currently collect and expand as agreed by SLG.

## Our Actions

### Commitment 6: Openness

Be transparent in the implementation of multicultural access and equity

Item	Action	Timeline	Target
6.1	Publish this Plan on the Office's intranet and internet. Report on performance against the Plan to the SLG and publish outcomes on the intranet and the Office's relevant annual reports.	August 2018	Intranet updated with Office's Multicultural Access and Equity Plan and updates on the Office's commitment to multicultural access and equity published in the Office's annual reports.
6.2	Report to DSS on the status of the Office's Multicultural Access and Equity Plan.	September 2018	Annually
6.3	Share strategies proven to remove barriers to access and equity with other agencies.	As DSS arranges meetings	IC member/s to participate in DSS-led Multicultural Access and Equity Interagency Support Group.
6.4	Seek feedback from CALD clients (directly or via FECCA) regarding the access and equity capability of the Office. Promote lessons learnt and opportunities to improve on the Office's intranet and at all-staff forums. Develop a standard measurable stakeholder feedback form/survey that is to be used across the Office and feedback consolidated to provide a holistic view on the Office's capability.	December 2018	Continued improvement in the Office's accessibility and capability to engage/communicate with CALD communities.

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## Office Contact

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## Help

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For assistance, please contact the Multicultural Access and Equity Section in the Department of Social Services by sending an email to [accessandequity@dss.gov.au](mailto:accessandequity@dss.gov.au) or calling 1300 792 343.