



**Legislative Assembly** for the  
**Australian Capital Territory**

Standing Committee on the Integrity  
Commission and Statutory Office  
Holders

# Submission Cover Sheet

## **Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and Electoral Act 1992**

**Submission number:** 015

**Submitter:** Canberra Multicultural Community Forum

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## Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) Inc.

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### Submission to the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders

#### Inquiry into the Operation of the 2024 ACT Election and the Electoral Act 1992

### About CMCF

The Canberra Multicultural Community Forum Inc. (CMCF) is the recognised peak body representing more than 110 ethnic and community organisations across the ACT and surrounding regions. Established in December 2005, CMCF was created to provide a unified voice for multicultural communities, advancing shared interests and articulating a clear direction for the multicultural sector in Canberra. Today, CMCF continues to act as the representative peak body and strategic advocate for multicultural communities in the ACT.

### A. Introduction

This submission addresses the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into the Operation of the 2024 ACT Election and the Electoral Act 1992. It draws on lived experiences from multicultural communities in Canberra and provides insights into electoral accessibility, voter education, and democratic inclusion.

CMCF submits this paper in its role as a strategic leader in multicultural governance and community advocacy. Our recommendations aim to strengthen electoral integrity, transparency, and participation, particularly for communities historically underrepresented in political processes.

### B. Response to Terms of Reference

#### 1. Report of the ACT Electoral Commissioner into the 2024 ACT Election

The ACT Electoral Commission's report highlights several commendable initiatives:

- **Commitment to inclusion** - The Commission's goal of delivering "trusted, transparent, secure, and accessible electoral services" is strongly aligned with community expectations.
- **Expanded access to the election booklet** - Distribution was broadened to include libraries, polling places, and community centres, which was particularly valued by voters in shared or multi-generational households.
- **Digital access** - Online availability creates future opportunities for multilingual formats, which would significantly improve engagement by multicultural voters.

Despite these positive steps, challenges remain:

- Limited multilingual outreach restricted participation.
- Consultation processes did not adequately include multicultural voices.

**Recommendation:**

**Future reports should include disaggregated data on multicultural participation and commit to co-designed engagement strategies, including multilingual election materials and structured community feedback processes.**

## **2. Voter Engagement**

### **(a) Timeframe and Accessibility of Early Voting**

Many multicultural voters, particularly elderly and shift workers, found early voting inaccessible, with information poorly translated and inconsistently distributed.

**Recommendation:**

**Extend early voting hours, including weekends, and deliver multilingual outreach through trusted community networks.**

### **(b) Number and Location of Ordinary Polling Places**

Polling places were unevenly distributed, with reduced accessibility in suburbs with high multicultural populations. Transport barriers further compounded turnout challenges.

**Recommendation:**

**Review polling place locations using demographic data and consult multicultural organisations on placement.**

### **(c) Sufficiency of Access to Mobile Voting Places**

Mobile voting was not consistently provided in aged care homes, disability services, or cultural centres.

**Recommendation:**

**Develop a mobile voting strategy in partnership with multicultural leaders and service providers.**

### **(d) Increasing Voter Turnout and Political Activity**

Many multicultural voters reported limited understanding of Canberra's voting system and political landscape, leading to disengagement or uninformed voting.

**Recommendation:**

**Fund community-led voter education, provide translated candidate summaries, and host multilingual forums.**

### **(e) Expanding the Voter Franchise to Permanent Residents**

Permanent residents make significant contributions to the ACT through work, taxes, and community engagement, yet remain excluded from local electoral participation. Granting voting rights to permanent residents in local elections would:

- Enhance democratic legitimacy by including those directly affected by local government decisions.
- Strengthen social cohesion and community belonging.
- Align the ACT with other Australian jurisdictions (Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania) and international best practice (e.g., New Zealand, Sweden, UK).

This proposal does not affect Commonwealth electoral laws and is achievable through territory-level reform. Safeguards, such as minimum residency requirements and multilingual voter education, can ensure electoral transparency and integrity.

#### **Recommendation:**

**The ACT Government should explore legislative reform to extend local voting rights to permanent residents, supported by civic education and consultation with multicultural communities.**

### **3. The Voting Process**

#### **(a) Electronic Voting: Implementation, Security, Transparency**

- Concerns were raised about digital literacy and vote security.
- Lack of translated guidance discouraged use.

**Recommendation: Provide multilingual tutorials and community-based digital support.**

#### **(b) Vote Exhaustion Rates**

- Many voters completed ballots without understanding preference distribution, resulting in high vote exhaustion.
- This highlights systemic gaps in voter education.

#### **Recommendation:**

**Develop visual guides and multilingual resources explaining preference voting.**

#### **(c) Voting Instructions**

- Instructions were overly technical and inconsistently translated.
- Fear of informal voting was common among multicultural voters.

#### **Recommendation:**

**Simplify and co-design multilingual instructions with community input.**

#### **4. Political Electoral Activity**

##### **(a) Authorisation and Regulation of Electoral Matter on Digital Platforms**

Community organisations lack clarity on electoral authorisation requirements, creating risks of non-compliance.

**Recommendation:**

- **Provide multilingual compliance guides tailored to community organisations.**
- **Host training workshops co-delivered with multicultural peak bodies.**
- **Establish an advisory helpdesk for authorisation queries.**
- **Require candidates to provide accessible contact details for constituents.**

##### **(b) Restrictions on Roadside Signage**

Restrictions disproportionately impact candidates with limited budgets, many from multicultural communities, who rely on signage in low-digital engagement areas.

**Recommendation:**

**Balance regulation with equity by designating low-cost signage zones.**

##### **(c) Truth in Political Advertising**

Multicultural voters are particularly vulnerable to misinformation in-language.

**Recommendation:**

**Create multilingual fact-checking partnerships and strengthen community media capacity.**

##### **(d) Restrictions on Campaigning Outside Polling Places**

Face-to-face campaigning is a valued form of engagement for multicultural voters, but unclear rules discourage participation.

**Recommendation:**

**Clarify guidelines and ensure culturally respectful enforcement.**

#### **5. Electoral Funding, Donations, and Expenditure**

##### **(a) Definitions of Electoral Matter and Expenditure**

Definitions are overly complex and inaccessible.

**Recommendation:**

**Simplify definitions and provide multilingual explanatory materials.**

##### **(b) Political Donations and Constitutional Compatibility**

Small community donations are critical for multicultural candidates, but lack of clarity creates barriers.

**Recommendation:**

**Introduce real-time disclosure and provide tailored compliance support.**

**(c) Public Election Funding**

Multicultural candidates face barriers in accessing public election funding due to limited awareness and infrastructure.

**Recommendation:**

**Create tiered funding models and mentorship programs for underrepresented candidates.**

**6. Other Relevant Matters**

- **Civic Inclusion:** Electoral systems must reflect Canberra's multicultural identity and uphold First Nations recognition.
- **Community Co-Design:** Electoral reforms should be co-designed with multicultural leaders.
- **Sector Integrity:** The role of peak bodies should be clarified to avoid duplication and confusion.

**C. Additional Proposal: Expanding Local Voting Rights to Permanent Residents**

As detailed in Section 2(e), expanding local voting rights to permanent residents is legally feasible, socially beneficial, and consistent with both Australian and international practice. CMCF respectfully requests the Committee to consider this as a forward-looking reform that aligns with the ACT's commitment to inclusive governance.

**D. Conclusion**

ACT's democratic future depends on ensuring electoral processes are inclusive, transparent, and community led. Multicultural voters are willing and eager to participate but require accessible support, multilingual education, and genuine inclusion in electoral reforms.

CMCF urges the Committee to adopt these recommendations as part of a broader commitment to equity, representation, and democratic empowerment.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this important inquiry.

**DATE:** 19 SEPTEMBER 2025

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