

**2024**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**Statement**

**Multiculturalism Annual Ministerial Statement 2024 and Racial Discrimination Elimination  
Government Response  
(pursuant to Section 17 of the Multiculturalism Act 2023 and in response to Racial  
Discrimination Elimination – Assembly Resolution of 23 March 2023)**

**Presented by  
Mick Gentleman MLA  
Minister for Multicultural Affairs  
June 2024**

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Madam Speaker, on Thursday 23 March 2023, the Assembly passed a resolution calling on members to denounce racism, undertake anti-racism training and continue its work in developing a localised anti-racism strategy which ensures the ACT Government and Members of the Legislative Assembly alike work together to harness multiculturalism and eliminate racial discrimination.

While I will provide an update to the resolution, I also welcome this opportunity to provide the inaugural Ministerial Statement that will speak to the ACT Government's commitment to multiculturalism; and recognition of the significant value Canberra's growing cultural and linguistic diversity contributes to our city.

The *Multiculturalism Act 2023* provides us with the foundation to unite in the belief that every individual, regardless of their background or journey to the ACT, is a valued member of our community. I can proudly say to Canberrans - your contributions enrich us, your freedom to express and celebrate your unique identities is safeguarded, and your right to equal participation in every aspect of our communal life is guaranteed. This is not merely a statement of principle; it is a declaration of our collective resolve to foster an inclusive, vibrant, and harmonious society where there is no place for racism.

Today, I stand before you to reaffirm our commitment to the principles enshrined in our multicultural charter where we take shared responsibility to ending racism and other forms of unlawful discrimination.

In the ACT we recognise and celebrate the array of cultures that form the heart of our community. From the enduring heritage of Australia's First Peoples to the myriad cultures, languages, and beliefs brought here by those who have

joined us from far and wide, each thread contributes to the strength and beauty of our social fabric.

On 15 November 2023, Canberra proudly became the second city in Australia to be awarded 'Advanced' level accreditation against the Welcoming Cities standard, a significant milestone that embodies the government's commitment to work closely with the community to ensure that everyone feels a sense of belonging where racism is denounced in all contexts.

In promotion of United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, all ACT Government directorates circulate all-staff messages to acknowledge and highlight the day in conjunction with Harmony week. Additionally, staff across the ACT Government have access to a range of training programs to support them in diversity awareness, conscious and unconscious bias and anti-racism. Staff training opportunities include both ACT Government wide training courses and directorate specific training modules.

Access to training extends to us all here today of course, as many of you will remember, the former Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister Cheyne, wrote to all Members of the Legislative Assembly in November last year providing details of the Anti-racism training provided by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and encouraging all of us to take advantage of it.

The ACT Government promotes itself an employer of choice for our culturally and linguistically diverse community (CALD) and supports CALD inclusion through the employee lifecycle. A recent review on attracting and retaining CALD individuals in the ACT Public Service found that while the current recruitment guidelines support diversity, more resources are needed to make recruitment processes inclusive for CALD individuals. To address this, the

guidelines are being updated with educational content for hiring managers. Additionally, work to deliver a mentoring program for aspiring Senior Executives from CALD backgrounds is progressing.

With the passing of the *Multiculturalism Act 2023* on 9 February 2023, reporting obligations for all ACT Government administrative units commenced from February this year, and I am pleased to share some of the extensive work ACT Government directorates are progressing.

### Community Services Directorate

Every year the Community Services Directorate (CSD) delivers the largest celebration of cultural diversity in the whole of Australia through our iconic 3-day festival that brings together more than 170 multicultural communities to share their culture, history and heritage through food, art, song and dance.

Each February, record crowds continue to flock to Civic vivaciously eating, dancing, enjoying, connecting and learning at the extravaganza. Many come from out of town, and even overseas, with crowd figures topping at least 250,000 people. CSD works each year with the many thousands of stallholders, performers, community organisation members, diplomatic corps and tireless volunteers to bring an unforgettable experience to fruition. That's quite a journey from the festival's humble beginnings in 1977.

CSD's Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy 2024-2027 aligns with the charter for multiculturalism, aiming to reflect and serve our diverse community effectively. This strategy prioritises diversity and inclusion within our workforce, supporting the ACT Government's strategic goals for the Canberra community.

Key initiatives include forming a Cultural Identity Diversity and Inclusion Network led by staff, launching a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Action Plan, and promoting staff engagement in cultural events such as International Mother Language Day and Refugee Week.

Additionally, the CSD Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Attraction, Retention and Development Plan 2024-2026 focuses on enhancing employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, contributing to a workforce that mirrors the community's diversity.

CSD has a dedicated Performance and Culture team championing these efforts, having introduced measures like the Diversity and Inclusion Hub, commemorating cultural days to foster an inclusive workplace, and supporting participants in the Work Experience and Support Program targeted to our CALD Canberrans and applying a multicultural perspective to workplace policies.

*Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD)*

CMTEDD provides critical assistance to the ACT Government's promotion as an employer of choice for our CALD employees.

As part of the Capital of Equality Grants program that aims to support and strengthen Canberra's LGBTIQ+ communities, the Office of LGBTIQ+ Affairs has ensured that the grants reach LGBTIQ+ people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Since the establishment of the Grants Program in 2019, 39% of all funded projects and community leaders' grants were for the benefit of LGBTIQ+ culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Most recently the Office of LGBTIQIA+ Affairs afforded capacity building grants to the Forcibly Displaced People Network, supporting the organisational development, upskilling the board, increasing participation of LGBTIQ+ displaced people and their professional development, and to Collective on Anti-Racism for the production of a series LGBTQIA+ events dedicated to enhancing understanding, promoting well-being, and raising community awareness of queer members within our multicultural communities and their allies.

### Education Directorate

Launched on Harmony Day 2023, the Education Directorate's CALD Staff Network aims to enhance recognition, appreciation, and promotion of cultural diversity within Education's workforce.

The School Cleaning Service employs more than 400 staff who are mostly migrants and English as a second language speakers, including the largest group of Dzongkha speakers (123) supporting a multilingual environment with over 23 primary languages. To support and recognise the value these public servants play in the maintenance of schools the Directorate:

- ran a survey in 2023 to identify all the various languages spoken within the School Cleaning Service
- introduced interpreting services for essential training and performance discussions
- is working to identify translators for all additional languages to support all documents being easily accessible to all staff

- has commenced initial engagement with the Department of Home Affairs Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to support provision of English language development when needed, and
- plans development of cultural recognition opportunities, providing opportunities for each cultural group to showcase themselves within the team.

The Education Directorate prioritises creating a culturally diverse workforce and an inclusive environment, tailoring recruitment and advertising to promote equity and celebrate cultural diversity. All job advertisements are crafted to position the Directorate as a welcoming and inclusive employer, especially appealing to teachers in the ACT, with recruitment imagery and stories reflecting this commitment. Through initiatives like the 'Be That Teacher Campaign', the Directorate shares the experiences of its diverse staff through various media, encouraging teachers from all cultural backgrounds to join.

The Directorate acknowledges the diverse needs of families and students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Communication products are tailored to ensure language is simple and has a readability level that is accessible by community. Where possible, key information and factsheets are developed as both easy-read documents and translated into languages other than English. At the school-level, staff engage with families from their communities to assist with the translation of key materials into languages as needed.

The Education Directorate funds access for all schools to the Translating and Interpreting Service, and the English as an Additional Language and/or Dialect

team provides resources and professional learning about accessing their education factsheets in 12 different languages for schools to share with their communities.

### Major Projects Canberra

Engagement undertaken or planned by Major Projects Canberra as part of the Canberra Theatre Redevelopment Project and the Light Rail Project provides just two examples of our commitment to cultivating relationships with, and listening to, diverse stakeholders.

Engagement and sharing information with our diverse community is key to Major Projects achieving its purpose of building infrastructure for our community that helps make Canberra the world's most liveable city.

### ACT Policing and Human Rights Commission

ACT Policing annually allocates resources to participate in the National Multicultural Festival, celebrating the diverse cultures of the ACT community. The presence of police at the festival is crucial for fostering and strengthening positive relationships with the community, especially for those from backgrounds where trust in law enforcement may be strained.

This engagement serves to demonstrate ACT Policing's commitment to community involvement and support, emphasising that officers are approachable and trustworthy. The police display is always popular among the crowds with long lines queueing on all three days for a chance to engage with our officers.

ACT Policing utilises its popular educational capability in Constable Kenny Koala at the National Multicultural Festival to connect, engage and build trust with young people in the multicultural community.

The 2023 National Multicultural Festival Team (which included ACT Policing) received an award for collaboration as part of the 2023 ACT Public Service Awards for Excellence.

ACT Policing's Community Engagement Team includes two Multicultural Liaison Officers; - one police officer and one professional staff member - who focus on engaging with the diverse ACT community. These officers collaborate with other liaison officers, such as those for Youth, Seniors, First Nations, and Disability Justice, to ensure comprehensive support for multicultural community members.

The liaison officers work closely with the ACT Multicultural Hub, connecting migrants, refugees, and young people from multicultural backgrounds with resources and government services, including the National Disability Insurance Scheme and family violence support.

Furthermore, they participate in various multicultural community events throughout the year, including the Eid-al Fitr Festival, Africa Party in the Park, African Soccer Tournament, Punjabi Sports Day, and the Holi and Harmony Festival. This active involvement demonstrates ACT Policing's commitment to engaging with and supporting the diverse communities within the ACT.

### *Human Rights Commission*

In 2023, the Children and Young People Commissioner , in collaboration with Curijo and the Multicultural Hub, published a report based on a year-long

consultation in 2022 on racism in the ACT. The report includes recommendations for reducing and responding to racism, particularly within services for children and young people.

The consultation engaged 2456 children and young people across the ACT, revealing alarming rates of racism experienced on a near-daily basis, along with concerns about inadequate adult support. This led to the formation of the Anti-racism Working Group, aligning with the charter for multiculturalism's commitment to combat racism.

Also in 2023, the Discrimination, Health Services, Disability, and Community Services Commissioner launched radio campaigns on Canberra Multicultural Services community radio, FM91.1, broadcasting public service announcements in Tamil, Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, and Arabic regarding the Commission's complaints services.

Additionally, the Commission published and distributed booklets in 8 languages outlining services and supports for victims of crime, abuse, neglect, or exploitation, which are available on the Human Rights Commission website.

As part of the Family Violence Safety Action Program team, the Multicultural Advisor and Case Coordinator provides culturally appropriate support to victim survivors of domestic and family violence from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, the Victim Support MLO offers culturally sensitive support to individuals impacted by crime, including family violence, and conducts educational workshops on cultural diversity and family violence. Both roles collaborate with various agencies to address the needs of multicultural communities impacted by crime.

### ACT Corrective Services

ACT Corrective Services streamlined its induction processes at the Alexander Maconochie Centre by introducing the Footprint Survey in 2023, which gathers comprehensive information on detainees' backgrounds, including cultural heritage, religion, and language needs, enhancing support for multiculturalism and ensuring access to cultural and religious resources.

This initiative underscores the commitment to inclusivity, reflecting the value of diverse cultures in the ACT community. Additionally, to address language barriers and improve access to essential services, the ACT Ambulance Service's education sessions by Call Takers aim to increase usage among non-English speakers, ensuring equitable access to emergency services.

### Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate

The City Plan outlines a vision for enhancing the City Centre for residents, visitors, and businesses, with public feedback gathered from 1 December 2022 to 14 March 2023, through various online platforms, and in multiple languages to ensure broad community involvement.

Additionally, in April 2023, the Aquatic Ecology Team supported Canberra's Buddhist communities in a "life-release" event at Lake Ginninderra, releasing native Golden Perch as part of a Buddhist tradition. This initiative underscores the importance of reintroducing native species like Golden Perch and Murray Cod to local waterways, ensuring their survival and the health of the ecosystem.

### Canberra Health Services

Canberra Health Services celebrated diversity in 2023 through various cultural and religious events, including a Lion Dance for Lunar New Year, special menus for Eid al-Fitr and Diwali, a Christmas decorating competition, and activities for Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week.

Canberra Health Services also held a Diversity and Inclusion Day offering training for staff on working with diverse backgrounds and abilities. Canberra Health Services consults with stakeholders, including consumers and non-government organisations, when developing or reviewing policies to ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion. Additionally, Canberra Health Services participates in the Vocational Employment Program to enhance workforce diversity. Food Services provide multicultural food options for inpatients, including First Nation, Halal, and Kosher meals, as well as traditional western and Asian cuisine.

The Food Services team collaborates with the Wellbeing/Workforce Culture team for special events and has introduced a Multicultural themed menu for staff and consumers. The Aboriginal Liaison Service at plans various activities to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including palliative care enhancements, postmortem support, and the Pathways to Wellbeing Project.

Further, Spiritual Support Services aim to respond to the diverse spiritual and emotional needs for patients at the hospital and those who care, including increasing staffing for multicultural spiritual support and diversifying access to contracted chaplains. They are also enhancing multifaith areas and celebrating spiritual traditions from different cultures and religions. Lastly, Canberra Health Services is undertaking a project to improve interpreter services based

on consumer feedback about challenges and concerns regarding interpreter availability and quality.

### Transport Canberra and City Services

The Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework and Toolkit, developed in 2022-23 by Transport Canberra and City Services, aims to create equitable, inclusive, accessible, and safe public spaces, particularly for women, girls, gender diverse, and vulnerable individuals. It aligns with the ACT Women's Plan 2016-26 and is informed by policies such as the *Human Rights Act 2004*, *ACT Discrimination Act 1991*, and ACT Wellbeing Framework 2020.

The framework guides planning and urban design decisions across the ACT. The Accessibility Reference Group facilitates consultation with stakeholders, including the ACT Deafness Resource Centre, Canberra Blind Society, National Disability Service, and others, to ensure that services and infrastructure meet the needs of diverse groups including our multicultural community. The group has been meeting quarterly for two years, discussing topics like bus stop upgrades, zero-emission buses, and public transport accessibility.

In 2023, Libraries ACT hosted Women's Health Matters Education sessions for 40 migrant and refugee women, covering topics like COVID-19 safety, sexual health, and understanding the health system. They also partnered with 'Afghan women on the move' to offer a leadership course for about 100 migrant and refugee women, including trauma support and practical skills like driving.

For children and young people, Libraries ACT dedicated 35% of their new purchases in 2022-23 to this demographic, offering materials in 21 languages and revamping the first reader collection for easier learning. The Rainbow

Reads group supports LGBTQI+ youth, and school holiday programs focus on inclusivity with Sensory Storytime and bilingual story sessions.

Additionally, the Non-English Speaking Background Communication Plan, part of the 2022-2024 strategy, aims to better include non-English speaking employees by translating key documents into Hindi and Punjabi, benefiting 20-25% of the workforce. This initiative reflects a broader commitment to inclusion and diversity.

Transport Canberra and City Services has also established and expanded Diversity and Inclusion Networks, focusing on areas like reconciliation, mental health, and women's issues. The Director-General leads the work to implement its diversity and inclusion initiatives, as outlined in the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2020-2023, by coordinating with executive sponsors and co-chairs.

In 2022-23, Capital Linen Service prioritised leadership development across all management levels, employing innovative methods for enhancing skills, particularly among emerging leaders. Recognising the diverse, multilingual workforce, with employees from 52 cultural backgrounds and primarily non-native English speakers, Capital Linen Service collaborated with a specialised adult learning and leadership development provider to create a customised program for its Leading Hands group.

This program resulted in increased enthusiasm, confidence, and proactive management among participants. Another leadership program is planned for the next financial year due to its positive outcomes.

As mentioned earlier, I now would like to turn our attention to the other part of our story – on the progress that is happening in the ACT in conjunction with

the ACT Government's administrative units and the implementation of the *Multiculturalism Act 2023*.

Madame speaker, everyone has a joint responsibility to address racism and discrimination and promote multiculturalism. The *Multiculturalism Act 2023* allows to me seek advice on matters that affect our multicultural community from the Ministerial Advisory Council on Multiculturalism.

The Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism commenced 1 September 2023, to progress the objectives of the *Multiculturalism Act 2023* and the Charter for Multiculturalism. The Council has held four formal sitting meetings with diverse stakeholders, providing input to inform key policies and projects from a multicultural community perspective. This included feedback on the Canberra Theatre redevelopment and the EPIC Fitzroy Pavilion refurbishment; advice to Elections ACT; and input into the Disaster Risk and Resilience Plan; The Council has also met with the City Renewal Authority and the ACT Human Rights Commission.

The Council made a key contribution to the ACT Legislative Assembly's Select Committee on the Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) Bill 2023. The Council provided a written submission, and was invited to present evidence at a public hearing with the Select Committee. Council members have also attended over 35 meetings, consultations, workshops and events, advocating multicultural perspectives to various forums such as the ACT Suicide Prevention Community Collaborative; the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council & Canberra Multicultural Community Forum's Framework to End Experiences of Racism workshop; the Gambling Harm Prevention Community of Practice; the ACT Ambulance Service Consumer Advisory Group; the ACT Disaster Risk Reduction

and Resilience Co-Design Group; the Stakeholder Advisory Panel for the Curtin Dementia Village Project; and the Evo Energy Consumer Reference Council and Icon Water Customer Advocacy Panel.

Looking across our funded service providers, our multicultural sector is contributing significantly to uphold the spirit of multiculturalism in our city.

For example, Welcome 2 Canberra Support Service plays a crucial role in assisting new migrants to settle in the ACT through valuable online resources. In recent years, the Welcome 2 Canberra website saw significant engagement, with visits from 928 unique visitors from 58 countries around the world.

The Workforce Participation program is another vital initiative working with a wide range of vulnerable clients from culturally diverse backgrounds, helping them seek employment opportunities. Since its inception in 2014, a total of 1,498 participants from multicultural backgrounds have registered with the program, with 1,067 participants finding work. The program boasts a success rate of 71% in helping participants secure employment.

The English Language Support program, which aims to deliver English language programs to asylum seekers on bridging visas in the ACT, offers three main language services: English for Living, English for Employment, and a Home Tutor program. In the past year, 176 individuals enrolled across all three programs, highlighting the importance and demand for these services.

Specifically, the English for Living program saw 116 participants, with a notable demographic trend of 56% of participants being over the age of 60.

In closing I want to say - as we move forward, let us all embrace our shared responsibilities—to value and celebrate the diversity that defines us, to

actively realise the benefits that such diversity brings to our civic, cultural, economic, educational, political, and social life, and to steadfastly work towards eradicating racism and all forms of unlawful discrimination. By doing so, we not only honour the spirit of our multicultural charter but also lay the foundation for a future that is rich in mutual respect, trust, and understanding.

We know that together we can achieve so much more, and whilst we still have much to do, the vital work shared with the Assembly today, showcases not only the commitment to ending racial discrimination and promoting multiculturalism, but speaks to the heart of what makes Canberra a proud and diverse city where everyone belongs.

**ENDS**