

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

**ACT Multicultural Framework 2015-2020 Second Action Plan 2019-2020 – First  
Report**

**Presented by  
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This statement provides a progress report on the implementation of the *ACT Multicultural Framework 2015-2020*.

The ACT Government is pleased to provide an update on what we have achieved since November last year.

Canberra is a community that embraces diversity. We are a community which is committed to social inclusion for everyone regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race and culture.

We are proud of our achievements to make Canberra a place where everyone can feel welcome; a place where everyone can belong and participate in our social, cultural, economic and civic life.

Our community benefits from the diverse ethnic backgrounds, skills and aspirations of the many people who have chosen to make Canberra their home.

The ACT Multicultural Framework supports our commitment to strive for a connected community where everyone is respected, included and valued.

The ACT Multicultural Framework 2015-2020 and both the First Action Plan (2015-2018) and Second Action Plan (2019-2020) were established as a result of extensive community consultation.

In the First Action Plan, we committed to deliver 28 actions against the three broader objectives of the Framework. The three objectives are:

1. Accessible and Responsive Services;
2. Citizenship, Participation and Cohesion; and
3. Capitalising on the benefits of Cultural Diversity.

We are pleased to say we have now fully delivered on all 28 actions under the First Action Plan, with the last two actions for which there was still some work to do being completed in 2019.

These two final actions completed in 2019, were the establishment of an ACT Honorary Ambassador Program and implementation of the ACT Language Services Policy.

Earlier this year, at the 2019 ACT Multicultural Awards, I was pleased to appoint two ACT Honorary Multicultural Ambassadors. The ACT Honorary Multicultural Ambassadors will promote Canberra as a welcoming and inclusive city here and internationally.

Last year, the ACT Language Services Policy was tabled. The Government can now announce that ACT Directorates have worked to develop an ACT Language Services Plan to guide the implementation of this policy. I am pleased to advise that almost all these plans are now finalised.

The individual directorate plans build on the important work that has already occurred across the ACT Government to improve language service delivery, including the development of policies and guidelines to strengthen equitable access to services and programs.

The Second Action Plan was tabled in this place in May this year.

The Second Action Plan has 22 actions against the three broader objectives of the Multicultural Framework that I mentioned earlier.

These 22 actions will guide the ACT Government to:

- effectively deliver services for all Canberrans;
- promote programs and activities that support a community that is inclusive and harmonious;
- provide genuine opportunities to assist Canberrans to reach their full potential; and
- maximise opportunities for all Canberrans to enjoy the benefits of our city's significant cultural diversity.

These 22 actions will ensure ACT services continue to be accessible and responsive to the needs of our diverse community. They will do this by making sure information is readily available and accessible for people choosing to make Canberra their home.

The Second Action Plan looks to build on our membership of the Welcoming Cities Network by getting us to the relevant membership level in order to start benchmarking our performance. By 2020, Canberra will achieve what is called the *Established* level of membership of the Network.

Through this process we will be able to identify where our future focus needs to be and this will be supported by building a strong evidence base.

Supporting all Canberrans to feel connected to their community remains a priority under the Second Action Plan. We have one focusing on initiatives such as public forums that explore what it truly means to belong to this community.

We will continue to fund services and programs that meet the current and future needs of our diverse community.

We are now halfway through the implementation of the Second Action Plan. To facilitate collaboration and implementation, we established an Inter-Directorate Implementation Group with representatives from each Directorate. The group shares information, facilitates joint planning and implementation and is the forum through which reporting is made.

Thanks to this process, we can say we have already achieved a lot.

On Harmony Day this year, Canberra joined the Welcoming Cities Network. Work is well under way to benchmark Canberra against the Welcoming Cities Standard and to achieve the *Established* level membership I mentioned earlier.

The ACT Government looks forward to sharing more details about our initial benchmarking against our membership level of Welcoming Cities with the community in the new year.

People move to our city for many reasons, including from the skilled migration program and humanitarian settlement programs. They come to Canberra to join family, to gain employment and to attend our educational institutions.

Relocating to a new city can be very daunting. That is why this Government is funding the development and implementation of a suite of 'Welcome to Canberra' support services to complement existing services.

The *Multicultural Hub*, formerly known as the Multicultural Youth Service and Multicultural Employment Services, will deliver on this commitment by providing a *Welcome to Canberra* pack to assist new Canberrans.

The pack will include information and links to services that migrants need to feel connected to our community. This service will not duplicate what is already available in Canberra, but rather complement existing services and make it easier to navigate our service system.

It will also provide tailored assistance to meet individual needs on issues such as housing, access to health services and trauma support, employment, transport, legal assistance and simple things like how and where to register a car.

These services will enhance the connections migrants have with Canberra and their participation in the community.

For many reasons, there are some people in our community who struggle to gain a sense of belonging in Canberra. To help us better understand what makes people feel a sense of connection or not, we have been hosting a series of public forums.

These *Importance of Belonging* public forums provide a platform for an ongoing dialogue between government and the community on difficult and challenging issues including racial discrimination and cultural bias, islamophobia, immigration status and extremism.

Fostering and supporting an open and direct dialogue on these issues is a crucial step for Canberra to grow as a city where everyone genuinely feels a sense of belonging where they are heard.

Three *Importance of Belonging* public forums have been held this year, each with a different focus:

- the first was with the South Sudanese community to highlight the importance of sense of belonging to community inclusion and safety;
- the second was with the Hazara community and explored the importance of supporting refugees to feel welcome as they make a new life in Canberra; and
- the third forum explored divisive or ‘hate speech’ which can spread very quickly if leaders and people of influence don’t condemn racism, bigotry, and extreme ideologies.

As Canberra grows, so does the need to ensure people are included and able to embrace each other's differences. This was a common theme through each forum.

A shared vision of what we want our city to be is critical to Canberra's future. The advice received from the ACT Multicultural Advisory Council is valued and the Plan includes specific actions to support its work.

The Multicultural Advisory Council is able to use the Joint Chair Meeting platform to foster opportunities to share and discuss work that crosses the range of ACT Advisory Councils, to ensure that the needs of all Canberrans are met.

We are confident that through an ongoing partnership with the Multicultural Advisory Council we will achieve our vision of an inclusive city. The ACT Government thanks the Council for partnering with it to develop this Action Plan.

Many Canberrans, including members of the multicultural community, have participated in community consultations for the development of the new ACT Wellbeing Indicators – another specific action under the Plan.

These Indicators will measure the ACT's progress and guide future government decisions and investments. We look forward to the launch of the Wellbeing Indicators next year.

To be able to participate and feel a sense of belonging in our community, it is important that your basic needs are met.

Having a place to call home, and a place to invite friends over to share a meal, is something that each of us in this place has. Some members of our community do not have this luxury.

That is why supporting women who are asylum seekers or migrants and their families who are at risk of homelessness remains a priority for this government.

Earlier this year, the ACT Government announced that Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services received \$1.8 million for a new homelessness service for asylum seeker and migrant women and families with uncertain visa status, while they wait for their immigration status to be resolved.

For some asylum seekers living in our community, paying the rent or filling the fridge with food can be difficult. They are often reliant on community organisations or charities to make ends meet.

That is why our Office for Multicultural Affairs established an annual discretionary fund of \$15,000 to support asylum seekers living in our community who are experiencing financial hardship.

While this sum is modest, people who work closely with those who struggle know that even a small amount can make a significant difference in a person's life. This money assists individuals and families to meet the basic cost of living, to obtain housing and second-hand furniture, and to fund opportunities for children.

Over the next twelve months, the Inter-Directorate Implementation Group will steer collaboration across the ACT Government to implement the balance of initiatives under our Second Action Plan.

As Canberra grows, so does the need to foster and build social inclusion through valuing and promoting culture and language. Language enables communication, which is essential to maintaining connections with friends, family and community. It also fosters social and economic wellbeing and maintains cultural identity.

With one in four Canberrans speaking a language other than English at home, it is important that we continue to invest in community language schools.

Under the Action Plan, we will conduct an independent review of the ACT Government's investment into community language schools. This review will ensure we continue to meet the changing needs of the Canberra community and that future investment delivers effective outcomes.

As our community grows, it is important that we use data to inform the future needs for Canberrans. That is why we have committed under the Plan to establish an evaluation framework to measure whether our programs and services are meeting the current and emerging needs of all Canberrans.

We will also develop information on unconscious bias to promote the benefits of a diversity when employing staff in local businesses, community organisations and across the ACT Government.

These are just a few of the actions that we have committed to implement over the next twelve months. We are confident that working with the community, we will deliver all actions under the Second Action Plan of the Framework.

We are proud of our achievements to make Canberra a strong vibrant diverse and inclusive community. This Government looks forward to continuing this work to strengthen our inclusive city so that everyone is welcome and supported to reach their full potential.