



# Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia

Submission into the News Media Assistance Program

12 February 2024



*FECCA pays its respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present and recognise the land we live and work upon was never ceded. FECCA proudly supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart and its call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice protected by the Constitution.*

*FECCA acknowledges that our work on behalf of multicultural Australia has learnt from and been enriched by First Nations peoples and organisations. We are committed to continuing to listen, learn and support First Nations peoples in the journey to a more inclusive society.*

## Foreword

The Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the News Media Assistance Program. As an important step in ensuring appropriate government assistance is provided to support a thriving news media that serves the needs of the linguistically and culturally diverse democratic society that is modern Australia, FECCA welcomes this consultation from the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication and the Arts (the Department).

For enquiries, please contact FECCA CEO Mary Ann Geronimo at [REDACTED].

## Who we are

FECCA is the national peak body representing people from multicultural communities and their organisations across Australia. Through the membership of state, territory, and regional councils, we represent over 1,500 community organisations and their members.

## What we do

For over 40 years, FECCA has proudly worked alongside culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the broader Australian society and the Commonwealth Government to build a successful, productive and inclusive multicultural Australia where everyone, no matter their background or how long they have lived in this country, can belong, contribute and reach their full potential.

FECCA draws on the lived experiences of the people and their descendants that have migrated to Australia and the expertise of its extensive and diverse membership to develop and promote inclusive, innovative and responsible public policy that reflects the needs and perspectives of multicultural Australia. We are dedicated to building a strong, innovative and inclusive multicultural nation that harnesses its greatest strength, the diversity of its people.

## Introduction

Democracy requires both the full participation of well-informed and engaged citizens, and a responsive government and administration, where everyone's voices are heard. News is an integral part of such a thriving society; a public good that informs and includes the full spectrum of diverse cultures, languages, experiences and views. The 2021 Census reveals more than half of Australian residents (51.5%) were born overseas or have at least one parent born overseas; and over 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home<sup>1</sup>. As the peak body representing 1500+ multicultural communities, FECCA strongly advocates for a news industry that serves, supports and represents the rich tapestry of modern Australia. By providing in-language news, fair representation of diverse communities, and inclusion of community perspectives, news media can foster social belonging, participation and cohesion.

Media plays a vital role in connecting our nation, shaping our national identity and reflecting the diversity of Australian society. Effective communication and engagement must be founded on a comprehensive and holistic approach that offers multiple points and formats for connecting and communicating. These frameworks must be co-designed with people from multicultural backgrounds and multicultural organisations to ensure they offer effective, culturally sensitive and accessible information (including language accessibility). Investment should be made in multicultural public broadcasting including increased and sustainable funding; media literacy and digital literacy and a national focus given

to inclusive media representation. Our approach to better supporting multicultural Australia includes a focus on inclusive communication and the development of a national language policy, as outlined in our submission to the Multicultural Framework Review which can be accessed [here](#).

As the media landscape changes, FECCA is intimately aware of the challenges and opportunities faced by news producers that cater to multicultural communities. Today, there are platforms where small communities, previously unserved by mainstream media, can access news and culturally relevant content in their language. Content from trusted community leaders can now be widely disseminated. However, news can also be a tool for the rapid spread of harmful and divisive scams, and mis- and dis-information that can have devastating impacts on communities. In addition to digitisation, communities will continue to contend with the impacts of innovation like Artificial Intelligence (AI). Careful consideration and thoughtful leadership from the Government is required to ensure technology does not become a tool for harm, and that everyone is supported to benefit from the opportunities that technology can bring. FECCA is looking forward to commencing its partnership with the Department of Communications which will deliver a small grants project building media literacy in multicultural communities and other efforts to embed the needs, perspectives and knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse communities in communications policy by facilitating knowledge transfer between our two organisations.

To support our communities and the news media industry to maximise the opportunities and take on the challenges posed by the rapidly changing scope of present-day media, we outline recommendations for the News Media Assistance Program in the following sections.

## Policy Objectives

The consultation paper identifies Access, Quality, Media Diversity and Engagement.

### Access

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**To fully measure access, consider the level of connection that news media providers have with the communities they serve, in addition to quantitative parameters of reach and engagement.**

Funding a diverse range of professional forms of media ensures that groups who rely on local, niche news outlets are not left out. Therefore, to effectively foster “a media landscape that supports community-led news services emerging to fill local news voids”, access to news must be understood beyond the number of citizens reached/accessed and examine the platform’s level of connection with communities. FECCA supports the recommendations in the Australian Communications and Media Authority’s Media Diversity Measurement Framework to include measures of community connection when considering multicultural communities’ access to news.

Access to public news journalism and media is crucial in ensuring citizens are engaged and informed on prominent issues concerning them. Many of Australia’s multicultural communities face multiple barriers to accessing news and media. These can include language-barriers, a lack of trust in media organisations, and different media consumption patterns, for example, studies show that migrant women indicated higher preference for online posts and community newspapers, while refugee women favour English classes and ethnic radio as trusted sources of news<sup>2</sup>.

The lack of access to news and appropriate information was made evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where misinformation and poorly translated information was disseminated by governments and several news outlets on digital media platforms, putting individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse groups at greater risk virus transmission and virus-related death. As a result, a sense of distrust in certain news media outlets has developed, which can greatly influence information and media consumption and civic compliance in multicultural communities<sup>3</sup>. To ensure the equity of access to reliable news for multicultural communities, public journalism and media that account for diverse and alternative media consumption preferences including communication methods must be supported.

## Quality

### Recommendation 2:

**Add contextualization, cultural appropriateness, and language standards to standard definitions of quality to ensure news serves the needs of multicultural communities.**

The consultation paper has highlighted several parameters that define quality news such as accuracy, impartiality, clarity etc. Additionally, the paper also points to a range of professional codes of practice and content safeguards that have been developed by the industry and governments relating to some of these issues, intended to either moderate or enhance their effects. Despite the availability of numerous standards, the needs of multicultural communities are not fully represented in these standards. To inform the various needs of multicultural communities, it is important that in addition to possessing all the above-mentioned characteristics of quality, news media should be:

**Contextualized:** News media should go beyond mere reporting of single events. First, news media content should provide the audience with background information and historical contexts. This is especially important for new migrants to Australia to situate current events with an awareness of the historical and political contexts of Australia. Contextualizing news provides this understanding of historical and political contexts and empowers community members with full information to engage events. Second, news media should also provide interpretations. Research-focused news stories, interpretations and opinion-oriented formats, where subjective perspectives are discussed, support the processes of democratic opinion-forming and debate<sup>4</sup>.

**Culturally Appropriate:** High quality news is relevant. While relevance is seen simply as a matter of subject-matter and geographic relevance, the most important step to build relevance and deliver news in a manner that is best understood is to ensure it is culturally appropriate. We saw this during COVID-19 when messages delivered by trusted community leaders, using culturally appropriate language and contexts, resulted in increased vaccine uptake in multicultural communities.

**Follow best language standards:** The 2021 Census shows that over 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home – consuming in-language news content<sup>5</sup>. Poorly translated news can cause harm by creating misinformation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some translated health and safety messages were nonsensical when translated, leading to negative outcomes for multicultural Australians, including higher rates of virus transmission and virus-related death. This in turn led to increased experiences of racial hatred, discrimination and harassment, putting entire communities at risk of harm<sup>6</sup>.

## Media Diversity

### **Recommendation 3:**

**Set and enforce benchmarks for representation so that all aspects of news media – production, distribution and presentation truly reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of modern Australia.**

Conventional definitions of news diversity consider content diversity and geographical diversity<sup>7</sup>. These parameters are important to ensure that the news available is wide-ranging, relevant and informative. Additionally, the consultation paper identifies the need for diverse perspectives, views and voices by encouraging many organisations to produce and distribute news. While business diversity is a pathway to create a space for diverse perspectives, numerous studies highlight the underrepresentation of multicultural identities and perspectives in Australia’s media landscape<sup>8</sup>.

A 2022 study found that, while 25 per cent of Australians have a non-European background, non-European presenters accounted for only 6 per cent of television appearances<sup>9</sup>. Multicultural audiences who feel misrepresented or underrepresented in the media are less likely to feel at home in Australia, and participate in social and political life<sup>10</sup>.

Research published by the World Economic Forum clearly indicates that diverse newsrooms are essential for the provision of news content that accurately represents the modern world. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that if the newsroom does not reflect the cultural diversity of society, audiences question the authenticity of the news content delivered<sup>11</sup>.

## Engagement

### **Recommendation 4:**

**Set and enforce safety and content moderations standards on news media engagement platforms to support full and fearless engagement of all Australians, including those from minority and marginalised groups.**

**Build awareness of standards and redressal mechanisms so that governments and communities can hold industry accountable.**

While engagement with the news is increasing, especially through social media platforms, this does not translate into trust. In fact, studies show that Australians’ trust in news is reducing over time, specifically due to perceptions of bias and conflicts of interest<sup>12</sup>. In addition to the Government’s support for news media organisations to deliver public interest journalism, it is important that the news industry takes steps to build people’s trust in their offering through greater transparency and accountability. For example, during COVID-19, the sensationalised headlines blaming China for the virus kickstarted racism towards the Chinese community<sup>13</sup>, resulting in 8 out of 10 Asian Australians reporting experiences of racism during that time<sup>14</sup>. It is therefore crucial that news media outlets are held accountable for their reporting to ensure that multicultural communities are no longer scapegoats for social, political, and economic issues.

The widespread circulation of mis- and dis-information also makes it important for news media providers to ensure that their engagement platforms their platforms are safe for marginalised and minority communities. This safety is crucial for promoting engagement within multicultural communities, as they are consistently targeted by many news media platforms during times of crises. It is the Government's responsibility to set engagement standards, simple complaint mechanisms and build awareness of these measures so that governments and communities can hold industry accountable.

## Potential Measures

In its consultation paper, the Department has identified three clear potential measures to support public interest journalism – direct funding, supporting business models and tax-based incentives. We know that multicultural communities rely on community media outlets, including community radio and online platforms with a member base drawn from specific cultural, linguistic and/or geographic communities.

### Funding Programs to support Public Interest Journalism

#### **Recommendation 5:**

**Develop a program to provide direct grant funding to multicultural news media platforms and organisations.**

**Invest in capability building of multicultural media by supporting programs through peak bodies like the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC).**

The Government provides direct funding to the media industry in the form of grants including the Journalist Fund, the Regional and Local Newspapers Publishers program, the Public Interest News Gathering Program, the Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package and the Regional and Small Publishers Cadetship Program. FECCA welcomes these direct grants and programs that serve public interest journalism for all Australians.

Multicultural news media platforms are a key source of trusted, relevant and appropriately presented news for multicultural communities. However, despite their importance, these small, frequently volunteer-run businesses have very little capability to generate sustainable funding on their own, depending on grants and external funding to remain viable. For this reason, FECCA urges the Government to consider instituting specific programs that cater to multicultural communities, just like there are specific programs that target regional publishers. Such specific programs targeting multicultural communities will ensure that underserved groups such as those in regional and remote communities, First Nations communities and multicultural communities are all supported, and can access essential funding needed to cater to the specific needs of groups that may be experiencing intersectional and reinforcing vulnerabilities.

Multicultural broadcasters' peak bodies such as the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council (NEMBC) play a critical role in supporting multicultural community broadcasting, maintaining and helping people maintain their connection to culture and language and build media diversity. Government support in capability building is a crucial measure to ensure multicultural broadcasters are sustainable and supported to provide high quality and trusted news presented in a culturally appropriate manner to multicultural Australia.

## Government Advertising

### Recommendation 6:

**Adopt codesign strategies to develop more effective, culturally appropriate government advertising for multicultural communities.**

**Build stronger digital advertising for multicultural communities.**

Government advertising can be an important mechanism for building trust among multicultural communities. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how trust can be lost through poor messaging and translations, leading to the spread of mis and disinformation and higher rates of virus transmission and virus-related deaths in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Public health communication to reduce the spread of COVID-19, poor translation and dissemination. This led to a decline in trust in Government in multicultural communities. To counter and address this, the Government should adopt the following strategies:

**Codesign messages with multicultural media providers:** As trusted leaders, multicultural media providers are best placed to advise the Government on developing and delivering messages in an effective, timely and culturally appropriate manner. Codesigning messages deliver multiple benefits including the development of high-quality content and increasing trust and engagement.

**Build stronger digital advertising for multicultural communities:** Many multicultural communities predominantly access news via digital platforms. To ensure digital news providers are supported, FECCA urges the Government to expand the scope of Government advertising to include a greater extent of culturally appropriate digital advertising.

## Support for Media Literacy

### Recommendation 7:

**Invest in programs to build the capability of multicultural communities and community organisations to improve media literacy.**

A lack of local news outlets and a distrust in mainstream media contributes to the higher levels of digital consumption and social media use in culturally and linguistically diverse communities<sup>15</sup>. The distribution of false and misleading information is highly prevalent on these platforms, thus increasing exposure to misinformation and disinformation. Higher levels of social media consumption and low media literacy levels create a barrier to effective participation in society and democracy, thus isolating multicultural communities from important issues and leaving them disengaged with issues that concern them. In addition, research shows that people from multicultural communities are less familiar with the term 'media literacy' than other Australians<sup>16</sup>, meaning that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may be unaware of misinformation and disinformation and the disproportionate risk they face from it.

Grassroots, community-level incentives are found to be the most effective way to introduce critical thinking about the media and develop community capability building through familiar and trusted ways<sup>17</sup>. However, it is crucial to ensure that community organisations are equipped with adequate

resources, funding, and support to ensure that they can effectively educate their communities. Community organisation board members and leaders have expressed their struggles in identifying trusted and accurate information to disseminate to their communities, particularly during the pandemic. Thus, in line with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's recommendation in the 2019 Digital Platform Inquiry, the government must also ensure that there are programs in place that invest in capability building in communities and community organisations to deliver digital media resources and training<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas>

<sup>2</sup> Lee, S. K., Sulaiman-Hill, C. M., and Thompson, S. C. 2013. "Providing health information for culturally and linguistically diverse women: priorities and preferences of new migrants and refugees." *Health promotion journal of Australia*. 24(2), 98–103. 102

<sup>3</sup> Bargain O, Aminjonov U. Trust and compliance to public health policies in times of COVID-19. *J Public Econ*. 2020 Dec;192:104316. doi: 10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104316. Epub 2020 Oct 29. PMID: 33162621; PMCID: PMC7598751.

<sup>4</sup> Bachmann, P., Eisenegger, M. and Ingenhoff, D., 2022. Defining and measuring news media quality: Comparing the content perspective and the audience perspective. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 27(1), pp.9-37.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/2021-census-nearly-half-australians-have-parent-born-overseas>

<sup>6</sup> Akolawa, N. (2022, February 18). Effects of the pandemic on multicultural migrants in Australia. Nisreen Akowala. <https://nisreenakolawala.com/2022/02/18/effects-of-the-pandemic-on-the-multicultural-australians>

<sup>7</sup> Bernstein, A., De Vreese, C., Helberger, N., Schulz, W., Zweig, K., Baden, C., Beam, M.A., Hauer, M.P., Heitz, L., Jürgens, P. and Katzenbach, C., 2020. Diversity in news recommendations. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2005.09495*.

<sup>8</sup> AMLA-Consultation-Workshop-Report\_UPDATE-25-10-2021.pdf (medialiteracy.org.au)

<sup>9</sup> Media Diversity Australia. (2022) *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories? 2.0*.

<sup>10</sup> Park, S., Griffiths, R., McGuinness, K., Nguyen, T. & Lee, J. (2023). Sense of Belonging Among Multilingual Audiences in Australia. Canberra: University of Canberra & Special Broadcasting Service.

<sup>11</sup> [World Economic Forum. \(2021\) Diversity in the newsroom can build better media. Here's why.](#)

<sup>12</sup> Flew, T., Dulleck, U., Park, S., Fisher, C. and Isler, O., 2020. Trust and mistrust in Australian news media.

<sup>13</sup> [People in Australia experiencing anti-Asian racism during coronavirus pandemic urged to speak out | SBS News](#)

<sup>14</sup> [More than eight in 10 Asian Australians report discrimination during coronavirus pandemic - ABC News](#)

<sup>15</sup> Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S. and Dezuanni, M. *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*, Sydney: Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra. 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S. and Dezuanni, M. *Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs*, Sydney: Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra. 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Dezuanni, M., Notley, T., & Di Martino, L. *Towards a National Strategy for Media Literacy: National Consultation Report*. Australian Media Literacy Alliance. 2021. [https://medialiteracy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/AMLA-Consultation-Workshop-Report\\_UPDATE-25-10-2021.pdf](https://medialiteracy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/AMLA-Consultation-Workshop-Report_UPDATE-25-10-2021.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [Digital platforms inquiry - final report.pdf \(acc.gov.au\)](#)