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The Multicultural Framework Review
Department of Home Affairs
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CANBERRA ACT 2600
By email: multiculturalaffairs@homeaffairs.gov.au
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Comments on Multicultural Framework Review – Terms of Reference (draft)

Dear Review Panel,

The Challenging Racism Project at Western Sydney University is the leading national research program on racism and anti-racism in Australia. It has a commitment to social justice and quality empirical research. The Challenging Racism Project (CRP) has global esteem for its research impact in countering racism and improving community relations. Since 2001, members of the CRP have pursued research on experiences of racism across a variety of settings including housing, education, and online, Australian attitudes to cultural diversity, Islamophobia, bystander anti-racism, and countering violent extremism. Our research is particularly pertinent for understanding the experiences of people from Australia's various and diverse cultural and linguistic communities, as well as attitudes towards individuals and communities that contribute to Australia as a multicultural nation.

We are pleased to see that the Review will address systemic barriers to cultural diversity, equity and inclusion. The Review will focus on the interactions and relations with communities, state and local governments as well as non-government organisations for provision of services and improving policies, programs and legislation.

However, the lack of reference to research and data collection and analysis in the areas of racism and anti-racism is our major concern in the Review Terms of Reference. Anecdotal and empirical evidence indicates that numerous ethnic, racial, national, religious, and migrant groups continue to be targets of racism and racial discrimination. The ongoing legacies of colonisation and profound structural racisms continue to have devastating effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' life outcomes. Given Australia's stated commitment to promoting multiculturalism and equality, and to eradicating racism, the collective knowledge about the nature, extent and impact of different forms of racism on people and communities in Australia is not as well developed as it should be. Stakeholders addressing racism increasingly recognise that anti-racism initiatives must rely on robust scholarly evidence and high-quality data. Yet existing data have serious limitations in identifying cohorts experiencing racism, perpetrator demographics, types of racism, settings where racism is experienced, and reporting state and local level data and responses

to and outcomes of racism. There are also gaps in data collection: longitudinal data that helps us understand the transformations and effects of racism over time is inadequate, and organisations have limited capacity and resources for routine data collection.

The Terms of Reference do not make explicit reference to emerging research relevant to racism and multiculturalism. This is particularly problematic in emerging contexts of concern such as online/social media and the sharing economy. There has been a growing Australian literature on online and offline racism, Islamophobia and far-right extremism. These can inform anti-racism action and policy for an inclusive and cohesive society. The Review is an opportunity for the government to engage with the existing and emerging literature for the best strategies and practices to be employed in institutional and policy settings to support Australia's multiculturalism over the next decade. We have provided a list of selected literature that would be pertinent to the Multicultural Framework Review.

Our second suggestion is that the Review Terms of Reference ought to review the state of the Australian research in this area: including its resourcing, sovereign capability and sustainability. Is there a fit for purpose research capability on racism and anti-racism sufficient to inform ongoing support for evidence-based policy and programs? Australia needs a national-level anti-racism research agenda to address inequalities, discrimination and racism. This will in turn inform effective policies and strategies to strengthen Australia's cohesion and meet the current and future needs of multicultural Australia. We would recommend a systemic review, using the Terms of Reference as key words, as part of the Multicultural Framework Review.

Our final suggestion is the establishment of a national research agenda and data management plan with a monitoring framework. This would enable the routine identification of gaps in research and demonstrate how prevalent racism is in Australia, where it occurs, how it manifests, and what its impacts are. A racism data management plan could feed into national, state and local anti-racism policy and practice. This should commit to longer-term data collection and be co-led by major stakeholders working on anti-racism, including government agencies and, non-government and community organisations, academic researchers and activists. Existing studies and reporting mechanisms must also be made more widely available. Policies that relate to the collection, analysis, reporting and overall management of racism data need to be improved to ensure the necessary data exist and are available for the use of policymakers, community organisations, researchers and other stakeholders.

Yours sincerely
Professor Kevin Dunn
On behalf of the Challenging Racism Project, Western Sydney University

Selected Literature:

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