



VICTORIAN
MULTICULTURAL
COMMISSION
ANNUAL REPORT
2016–17



Lehenda Ukrainian Dance Company at the Premier's Gala Dinner, March 2017
Front cover: Attendees at Culture Waves concert, March 2017

LETTER TO THE MINISTER



Robin Scott MP
Minister for Multicultural Affairs
Minister for Finance
1 Macarthur Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Minister,

In accordance with Section 21 of the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*, I have great pleasure in reporting on the Commission's operations for the period 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Kapalos". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Helen Kapalos
Chairperson

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Mitch Firth opens the Premier's Gala Dinner in March 2017 with a moving performance reflecting on Australia's Indigenous journey

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CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

It gives me great pleasure to report on another busy and productive year at the Victorian Multicultural Commission, where much has been achieved through the collective resilience and strength of our multicultural communities.

Here is where the most satisfying outcomes and achievements lie. As the primary conduit between our multicultural communities and government, our communities' views inform the policy of the day, as we work to strengthen the social cohesion of this state.

The heart of our work is community engagement, and community is also where the heart of Victoria resides. It is the cultural DNA of this great state. Every visitor and every resident will attest to the vibrancy of our culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We are all enriched by that diversity every day.

In 2016-17 we delivered one of the most successful Cultural Diversity Weeks to date, with record audiences and a strong and dynamic presence in the heart of Melbourne. At Federation Square we welcomed thousands of new onlookers to witness the state's largest multicultural festival. It was truly a spectacular showing.

Apart from showcasing our wonderful diversity, facilitating better employment outcomes for our communities remains a key priority. Access and participation for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) youth was addressed through the Commission's development of an initiative for paid internships for young people seeking work experience as broadcasters and journalists. This initiative will increase CALD representation in mainstream media and ensure the voices of a more diverse community are heard.

The Commission is strengthened by the individual expertise of our Commissioners. We have benefitted from their knowledge of culturally-appropriate solutions, including informing services such as aged care, settlement, employment, and family violence prevention.



VMC Chairperson Helen Kapalos speaking at the Moroccan Deli-cacy Women's Iftar Dinner, June 2017

The Commissioners also inform policy development in social inclusion through the areas of arts, sports and culture.

In the area of settlement, I had the opportunity to travel to North America to meet with lead organisations and government representatives to understand best-practice approaches to the resettlement of Syrian refugees. The warmth of the community response was tangible in the Canadian experience, with individuals opening their homes and whole towns rallying to make the displaced feel welcome. Our observations are published in the report *A Settlement Journey*. Consequently the Commission is leading a state-wide strategy to create a holistic framework for an integrated, vibrant and sustainable settlement sector.

We are also applying the learnings of the Canadian experience as we commence a pilot with a group of newly-arrived Assyrian refugees, to examine resettlement options in rural Victoria.

In 2016-17 the Commission addressed community concerns by making submissions on government policy in the areas of citizenship, strengthening multiculturalism, the right to religious freedom, the right to free speech, housing, infrastructure, and settlement.

And of course, we never forget that advocating for our communities requires a courageous voice and firm position as global conversations about multiculturalism continue to divide communities across the world. Ultimately, how well we accept one another is a test of our humanity. To that end, our most important work has only just begun.

We hope the annual report provides an insight into the strength of our state's diversity and the great work which is being undertaken to make us one of the most successful multicultural stories in the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Helen Kapalos'.

Helen Kapalos
Chairperson

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

6,244,200
Victorians

29% overseas born

247 countries of birth

26%

speak a language other than English at home

234
languages

135
religions

12 Commissioners

11 Commission meetings

463

meetings attended by Chairperson

62 community consultations

3 reports published

8 policy submissions made

\$293,000
Commission expenses

\$197,000
Community Support Fund

211

meetings attended by Commissioners

8 Regional Advisory Councils

39 projects funded

15 Regional Advisory Council meetings

7 major events

33 Multicultural Awards for Excellence recipients

55,000 Victoria's Multicultural Festival attendees

1390

Cultural Diversity Week
Premier's Gala Dinner attendees

OUR FUNCTIONS



VMC Chairperson Helen Kapalos at the Cultural Diversity Week Supporters' Event, November 2016

WHAT DOES THE VICTORIAN MULTICULTURAL COMMISSION DO?

The Commission was established in 1983 and is the voice of Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Informed by grassroots consultation and a network of Regional Advisory Committees, the Commission advocates to all levels of government, links multicultural communities with services, and hosts events that showcase and promote our state's vibrant cultural diversity.

The functions of the Commissioner are set out in section 8 of the Act which requires that the Commission meets the objectives of the Act as well as:

- undertakes wide ranging consultations to determine needs;
- researches, reports and advises the Minister on systemic community issues identified by the Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) and through community consultations or that relate to services to diverse communities;
- advises and makes recommendations to the Minister on multicultural affairs;

- develops partnerships between community organisations providing settlement support and service delivery to diverse communities; and
- develops harmonious community relations.

RELATIONSHIP TO GOVERNMENT

As an independent statutory authority established under the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*, the Commission provides independent advice to government on policies and programs that are relevant to multicultural communities.

In November 2016 a structural change in the Department of Premier and Cabinet brought the Commission's secretariat, now the Office of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, into the Department's newly formed Multicultural Affairs and Social Cohesion Division (MASC). As set out in an updated Memorandum of Understanding, MASC staff support the Commission to deliver many of the activities detailed in this report.

As a result of the restructure and pursuant to a determination made by the Minister for Finance under section 53(1)(b) of the *Financial Management Act 1994*, the Commission's operating budget – excluding board expenses – was incorporated into the Department's financial statements.

OUR COMMISSIONERS



VMC Commissioners meeting, February 2017

The Commission comprises 12 Commissioners, including the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Youth Commissioner and Community Representative Commissioner. All Commissioners are appointed for a four year term, with the exception of the Community Representative Commissioner and Youth Commissioner, who are appointed for two years.

Ms Helen Kapalos Chairperson

Current term: 17 August 2015 to 17 August 2019
First appointed: 17 August 2015

An accomplished journalist, presenter, executive producer and filmmaker, Helen Kapalos is a proud Greek Australian who is passionate about supporting Victoria's culturally diverse communities. Helen has also worked in a number of philanthropic roles including Director at the Heart Foundation, Director of Federation Square, Ambassador for the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation, and Ambassador with Community Languages Australia. Her successful media career has included working for all three Australian commercial television networks and the two public broadcasters.

Mr Ross (Spiro) Alatsas Deputy Chairperson

Current term: 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2017
First appointed: 1 September 2011

Ross (Spiro) Alatsas has a long and impressive history of involvement in the Greek and wider Victorian communities, having been the General Manager of the Greek Media Group since 1997. He has been involved with various committees and advisory councils promoting Victoria's cultural diversity, and was Acting Chairperson from 11 April to 16 August 2015. In 2017 Ross applied his great energy to the establishment of the Multicultural Chamber of Commerce Group.

Mr Chidambaram (Srini) Srinivasan
Current term: 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2017
First appointed: 1 September 2011

Chidambaram (Srini) Srinivasan has worked in the IT industry in Australia, India, Japan and USA for more than 32 years, as well as volunteering for a charity.

“On behalf of VMC, I had the opportunity to initiate the promotion of cultural competence and sensitivity in all walks of our public life, especially among the service providers who come in contact with the diverse communities. This greatly helps in improved communications between different peoples based on an effort to understand and work with each other better.”

Dr Teresa De Fazio
Current term: 31 August 2013 to 30 August 2017
First appointed: 1 September 2011

Dr Teresa De Fazio is an academic and author who has worked on various initiatives with organisations such as the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Australian Federation of Ethnic Schools Association and the Western Region of General Practitioners Association. She has been active in supporting international students and fostering an inclusive academic environment. Teresa has fond memories of her own time as an overseas student abroad and of her experience growing up in Australia.

“A highlight of 2016-17 was opening the Italian Festa in Carlton. I remember attending the Festa as a young girl with my family and all the excitement: the specialty food, the variety of music, the different events, hearing Italian being spoken – and the gelato! It continues over the years to be a very special way the Italo-Australian community comes together to share its culture and knowledge with the wider multicultural community in Victoria.”



VMC Commissioners, from L-R: Tina Hosseini, Helen Kapalos, Ross Alatsas, Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts, Sonia Vignjevic, Teresa De Fazio

Dr Sundram Sivamalai
 (Community Representative Commissioner)
 Current term: 27 October 2015 to 30 August 2017
 First appointed: 27 October 2015

Dr Sundram Sivamalai is a current board member of the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria and has extensive community and government advisory experience.

"The VMC nurtures communities through funding support and I particularly enjoy sharing the joyous moments of the communities at their celebrations."

Ms Tina Hosseini
 (Youth Commissioner)
 Current term: 27 October 2015 to 30 August 2017
 First appointed: 27 October 2015

Tina Hosseini has extensive experience representing youth on advisory boards and is an active member of the Iranian Women's Association. Tina chairs the Multicultural Youth Network and enjoys the opportunities to engage with diverse youth representatives in her role as Youth Commissioner.

Mr Tsebin (Bin) Tchen
 Current term: 27 October 2015 to 30 August 2019
 First appointed: 27 October 2015

Tsebin (Bin) Tchen has extensive community, public sector and political experience and previously served as a Senator for Victoria from 1999 to 2005. Bin is an Adjunct Professorial Fellow at the Asia-Pacific Centre for Social Investment and Philanthropy, Faculty of Business and Law, Swinburne University of Technology.

"The Afghan national day event in Springvale was a highlight of 2016-17 – a family event bringing many groups together. I am always impressed by how well organised and well attended these events are and the great commitment from community members, local service providers and parliamentarians to support our diverse communities."

Ms Sonia Vignjevic

Current term: 27 October 2015 to 30 August 2019

First appointed: 27 October 2015

Sonia Vignjevic was appointed as Acting CEO at the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau in August 2015. Her previous roles include Principal Advisor of Operations at Anglicare Victoria and National Manager of Community Migration Programs at Australian Red Cross. She has an extensive history of service provision for migrant and refugee communities and has brought this expertise to her work with the Commission.

Dr Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts

Current term: 27 October 2015 to 30 August 2019

First appointed: 27 October 2015

Dr Mimmie Claudine Ngum Chi Watts is a lecturer in Community Health at Victoria University. Mimmie is an expert on refugee and minority group health and has published widely in the areas of health and cultural and linguistic diversity. She has experience on community boards and is proactive in the migrant and refugee community.

Mr Sam Almaliki

Current term: 22 December 2015 to 30 August 2019

First appointed: 22 December 2015

Sam Almaliki is passionate about inclusion and diversity, has experience in community engagement and has sat on a number of boards and advisory committees. Sam previously served as a Commissioner for Multicultural NSW.



The Commission welcomed its newest Commissioner Sisay Dinku on 9 May 2017

Mr Sisay Dinku

Current term: May 2017 to 30 August 2019

First appointed: May 2017

Sisay Dinku has a strong record of successfully supporting African Australian communities and the broader multicultural community in Victoria, with a focus on employment programs for new migrants and highly disadvantaged job seekers. Sisay is a founding member of Celebration of African Australians, a Councillor of the Pan African Australasian Diaspora Network, a member of the African Ministerial Working Group, an AFL Multicultural Community Ambassador and the Chairperson of the African Union Delegates Liaison.

Mr Grahame J Leonard AM

Current term: 31 August 2013 to January 2017

First appointed: 1 September 2011

Grahame J Leonard AM resigned as Commissioner in January 2017.

MEETING OUR OBJECTIVES



The audience at the VMC Film Festival, March 2017

The Commission's objectives are set out in Section 7 of the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*. This report highlights a range of activities undertaken in 2016-17, and their relationship to the Commission's ten objectives.

PROMOTING PARTICIPATION

Objective 1: Promote full participation by Victoria's diverse communities in the social, cultural, economic and political life of Victoria.

VOICES FROM AROUND THE STATE

The Commission is advised by eight Regional Advisory Councils (RACs) from around Victoria. RACs are the Commission's eyes and ears on the ground, keeping Commissioners and the Victorian Government well informed about the issues that matter to our state's multicultural communities.

There are three RACs in metropolitan areas and five in regional areas, and their members come from 36 different cultural backgrounds. Members are selected through a public expression-of-interest process, and include community members, service providers, local business owners and local government representatives.

In 2016-17, RACs heard from guest presenters on financial literacy from the Australian Taxation Office, and on alcohol and other drugs from Ballarat Community Health. Community leaders were also invited to present on issues affecting migrants and refugees, and other issues unique to particular ethnic communities.

RAC meetings are also regularly attended by representatives of Victoria Police. This engagement is two-way, with police sharing valuable information with RAC members, and RAC members serving as an important conduit through which the voices of their communities are heard by police.

"The Regional Advisory Councils are a really great source of information."

– regular Victoria Police attendee



MYN member Mary Nega and VMC Youth Commissioner Tina Hosseini at an MYN event, April 2017

"I thoroughly enjoyed chairing the Multicultural Youth Network. It was a real honour to work among talented and passionate young people to deliver a Mental Health Youth Forum, where we heard from both service providers who delivered services to multicultural youth, as well as from young people who experienced challenges in accessing these services."

– Youth Commissioner Tina Hosseini

In 2016-17 RAC members also had extensive input into the development of a Multicultural Engagement Plan by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

The 2015-17 RAC members finished their term in June, and an expression-of-interest process was undertaken to select members for the 2017-19 term.

MULTICULTURAL YOUTH NETWORK

The Multicultural Youth Network (MYN) forms part of the Commission's crucial role in advising the Government on key issues affecting culturally and religiously diverse young people. Established in 2007, the MYN is chaired by the Multicultural Youth Commissioner, and provides young Victorians with the opportunity to participate in, and learn about government decision-making processes.

The most recent membership comprised of eight young people from a range of cultural backgrounds, chaired by Youth Commissioner Tina Hosseini. In April 2017, the eight members concluded their two-year terms and joined the large and engaged MYN alumni community. As at the end of 2016-17, recruitment of new members was underway, with a vision to expand the membership to around 20 young people.

One of the MYN's many achievements in 2016-17 was a mental health forum they hosted as part of National Youth Week. The forum was an opportunity to discuss differing cultural approaches to mental health, the mental toll of settlement and discrimination, and strategies for assisting young people from diverse backgrounds.

COMMISSION INFORMS NEW YOUTH POLICY

In mid-2016 the State Government released its new youth policy, *Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria*. The policy drew heavily on the Commission's consultations with young people from multicultural backgrounds and the Commission's 2015 *Engaging Our Youth Our Future* report.

The Commission welcomed the initiatives outlined in the new state policy, such as the inaugural Youth Summit held in March 2017, which was attended by members of the Commission's Multicultural Youth Network. The policy also reiterated the importance of meeting multicultural young people's needs through language services, refugee education, leadership development through the Multicultural Youth Network, connection to the community through sport, and opportunities to strengthen cultural identity.

“What the VMC has done is simply amazing. Many of these groups had not previously had the confidence to engage publicly.”

– Hume Council representative

VICTORIANS HAVE THEIR SAY

The Commission conducted a range of town hall-style meetings and roundtable discussions across the state to seek the views of diverse communities on issues that affect them. A Community Conversation in Bendigo was an opportunity for local residents to hear from the Commission and from their service providers and council on the initiatives that address local issues. At a consultation with the Assyrian community the Commission heard from a group with agricultural expertise who had helped develop the food bowl of north-west Syria. This led to further discussions with the Commission about their options for resettlement in regional Victoria and engagement with regional stakeholders. Other examples of consultations were those with members of the Coptic community, with young South Sudanese women, and in the multicultural municipalities of Casey and Hume.

At the Hume consultation in February 2017, more than 70 residents discussed employment, public safety, transport and youth issues. Attended by Chairperson Helen Kapalos, Youth Commissioner Tina Hosseini and Commissioners Sonia Vignjevic and Sam Almaliki, the consultation was a chance for Hume residents to communicate the barriers and challenges they face, and to hear about new government services available to them. The consultation led to further dialogue with transport authorities about safety on public transport and inclusive spaces, particularly for women and young girls from culturally diverse backgrounds.



An attendee at the Moroccan Deli-cacy Women's Iftar Dinner, June 2017

SAFE AND STRONG WOMEN

In August 2016, the Commission co-hosted a gender equality forum for women from culturally diverse backgrounds with the late Minister for Women and Prevention of Family Violence, Fiona Richardson. Participants discussed workforce participation and economic security, women's development and leadership, education and employment (specifically in science, technology, engineering and maths), health and wellbeing, and violence against women and girls.

The forum was part of a round of state-wide consultations held by the Office for Women and Prevention to inform the state's first ever gender equality strategy, *Safe and Strong*. The Commission also provided a submission to inform the strategy's development, which highlighted the additional barriers that culturally diverse women face in achieving gender equality. *Safe and Strong* reflects this aspect of the Commission's advice, and the Commission provided additional input into the subsequent action plans.

Minister for Multicultural Affairs Robin Scott and VMC Chairperson Helen Kapalos with MYN members, April 2017



EFFECTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES

Objective 2: Promote access by Victoria's diverse communities to services made available by governments and other bodies.

REFUGEE SETTLEMENT: LEARNING FROM OTHERS

The United Nations has called the conflict in Syria the biggest refugee and humanitarian crisis of our time, with more than half the country's pre-war population killed or forced to flee their homes. In 2015 the Australian Government committed to accept an additional 12,000 refugees from Syria and Iraq, one third of whom would come to Victoria. The Victorian Government directed the Commission to take a lead role in coordinating their settlement into the community.

In September 2016, Commission Chairperson Helen Kapalos travelled to North America to investigate best-practice settlement initiatives. Canada is widely lauded as a multicultural success story with an innovative approach to welcoming and supporting refugees, and in March 2016 the Canadian Government announced a plan to resettle more than 50,000 Syrians.

The Chairperson visited the Canadian cities of Vancouver, Toronto and Ottawa, with additional stops in New York and Washington DC to hear about successful US resettlement programs. Along the way she met with politicians, service providers, academics and community members who shared their experiences and learnings. The findings of the trip have been summarised in the report *A Settlement Journey*, which makes recommendations to government on a way forward for improving refugee settlement in Victoria, and Australia more broadly.

The report identified political leadership, positive media narratives and coordinated services as some of the main contributors to successful resettlement. For example, most people the Chairperson met with noted that a recent change in government sentiment on refugees had changed the attitudes of many everyday Canadians. The report also notes that sport, art and culture programs provide important avenues for refugees to meet people and participate in their new neighbourhoods.

Recommendations stemming from the report include the development of a welcoming strategy for migrants and refugees, a one-stop website for new arrivals to access relevant information, and more involvement from refugees themselves in resettlement service planning.



The front cover of *A Settlement Journey*

VMC Chairperson
Helen Kapalos meeting
with New Change to
discuss the Migrant
Settlement Outcomes
Inquiry, February 2017



MIGRANT SETTLEMENT OUTCOMES

In January 2017 the Commission responded to the Federal Government's call for submissions on migrant settlement outcomes. The inquiry had several purposes. The first was to assess the effectiveness of settlement services currently available in Australia, and to gather examples of international best-practice. The Commission pointed to several of the findings of its recent report, *A Settlement Journey* (see page 14), such as the importance of family reunification, and mental health support for refugees who have fled violent and traumatic situations.

The inquiry also sought to determine the extent to which English language proficiency is a determinant of positive settlement outcomes. The Commission cited research which supported a correlation between language proficiency and unemployment, and commended the remodelling of the Government's Adult Migrant English Program to provide greater flexibility and more class hours.

Lastly, the Commission responded to a call for comment on the settlement outcomes of young migrants and the risk of involvement in "gang activity". The Commission cited crime statistics which indicate young people born overseas are less likely to offend than young people born in Australia, and noted that the factors that lead migrant and refugee youth to engage in anti-social behaviour are not related to their ethnicity. Rather, they are the same factors influencing anti-social behaviour in the wider population – socio-economic disadvantage, exposure to violence and a lack of support.

The Chairperson attended a public hearing in February 2017 to speak to the submission.

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

In October 2016 the Commission responded to a consultation paper produced by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and spoke to their response at a December 2016 hearing.

In particular, the Commission advocated for restorative justice programs as a means to ensure victims and survivors from multicultural communities are supported to seek criminal justice. While acknowledging that restorative justice approaches can be contentious, the Commission suggested that there are circumstances where it can be a viable approach. The Royal Commission's final report included this advice, and drew extensively on the Commission's testimony.

FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION FORUM

In March 2017 the Commission co-hosted a forum on reproductive rights and female genital mutilation with the Department of Health and Human Services. As well as providing an opportunity to discuss the health and social impacts of female genital mutilation, the forum also celebrated the success of the Family and Reproductive Rights Education Program launched in 1998.

The event was part of the Commission's response to a recommendation made by the Royal Commission into Family Violence. Namely, it was recommended that the Commission and the Department of Health and Human Services work together to communicate the health risks of female genital mutilation, and to emphasise that it can be a form of family violence and a criminal offence.

INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS OF MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

In November 2016 the Commission responded to the draft of Victoria's 30 Year Infrastructure Strategy.

Feedback from community consultations and the Commission's Regional Advisory Councils has consistently highlighted the housing and transport challenges faced by new arrivals.

The Commission supported the draft strategy's recommendations to increase densities in established areas, manage transport network demands through a pricing regime, and invest in social and affordable housing.

The Commission also highlighted that the adequacy of infrastructure has a powerful impact on people's lives and their experience of living in a diverse society. Pressure on the accessibility of jobs, housing and services can influence the established community's willingness to welcome extra people to our state, and to support multiculturalism more broadly.

FAIRER SAFER HOUSING

Fairer Safer Housing is the Victorian Government's work program for ensuring all Victorians have access to safe, affordable and secure housing. Reviewing the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* is a critical part of this program.

The Commission has played a key role in the development of the Fairer Safer Housing program over the past few years, sitting on the Consumer Affairs Victoria steering committee and responding to discussion papers on rent, bonds, and the responsibilities of landlords and tenants. This culminated in the Government releasing an options paper which the Commission responded to in February 2017.

ELDER ABUSE IN MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

In February 2016 the Federal Government announced an inquiry into protecting older people from abuse by their families, care staff and others. Elder abuse can be physical, psychological, financial or sexual.

The Commission made a submission to the inquiry which noted that information provided by its Regional Advisory Committees suggested elder abuse was an issue of increasing concern for Victoria's culturally diverse communities. Information provided by the Commission was included in the recommendations stemming from the inquiry.



CULTURAL EXPRESSION



The crowd enjoying Culture Waves concert , March 2017

Objective 3: Encourage all of Victoria's diverse communities to retain and express their social identity and cultural inheritance and to promote mutual respect.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY WEEK

Cultural Diversity Week 2017 marked the 15th year that Victorians have come together for the week-long celebration of the state's vibrant and diverse cultures.

This year's theme was *Our journey, Our stories*, to reflect the shared journey of Victorians in becoming a successful multicultural society, and to showcase the collective stories that have helped shape and enrich our ever-diversifying community. Throughout the week, the Commission invited Victorians to share their story of cultural heritage on social media, through film or art.

Running from 18 to 26 March, Cultural Diversity Week coincided with the United Nations Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – otherwise known as Harmony Day – on 21 March.

In partnership with the Victorian Government, the Commission presented a range of events to highlight the diverse sights, sounds and tastes that people from all over the world have brought to Victoria.

PREMIER'S GALA DINNER

The Premier's Gala Dinner officially launched Cultural Diversity Week and was attended by nearly 1,400 people, including representatives from 46 different cultural and faith groups. Held at the Melbourne Exhibition and Convention Centre, the gala featured Bollywood funk band The Bombay Royale, Indigenous vocalist Kylie Auldist and K-pop singer Hany Lee, along with dance performances in Greek, Ukrainian and different African styles.

VICTORIA'S MULTICULTURAL FESTIVAL AND CULTURE WAVES CONCERT

The Multicultural Festival took place at Federation Square on Saturday 25 March and was attended by 55,000 people. The free event included food and market stalls, live music and dance from 36 different cultures, as well as interactive activities like tai chi and turban tying. In the evening, the Commission staged the very first Culture Waves concert for young Victorians, which featured up and coming musicians from multicultural backgrounds.



VMC Film Festival entrants and Swinburne/VMC Summer Film Project students

VMC FILM FESTIVAL AND SWINBURNE/VMC SUMMER FILM PROJECT

The inaugural VMC Film Festival invited young people to share their perspective on multiculturalism through the power of film. Entrants were asked to explore the theme *Same, same but different: Is there more that unites us than divides us?*

The judges received some outstanding entries, and finalists had their films screened at the Multicultural Festival at Federation Square. The winning film in the under-25s category was *Ask a Muslim*, directed by Tiffanie-Jowie Liew. The ten-minute film documented a “Muslim speed dating” event (funded by the Commission) that aimed to break down stereotypes by inviting people to ask Muslim women about their lives and faiths. The over-25s category was won by George Clipp’s film *Abe’s Words*, which featured Sudanese-born spoken word artist and community educator Abe Nouk.

The Commission also provided funding to Swinburne University to run a summer film program for ten current and past film and animation students. The young filmmakers were asked to explore the theme of migrant and refugee journeys, and four of the resulting short films were screened at Federation Square during the Multicultural Festival. Participants were also interviewed by Swinburne researchers as part of a study into the best ways to sustain, enrich and reimagine multiculturalism for the contemporary era.

COMMUNITY-RUN EVENTS

The Commission also actively encouraged the community to host their own celebrations. Almost 120 events from across the state were registered and promoted on the Cultural Diversity Week website, including art exhibitions, discussion forums, sporting events, community meals and performances. Among the festival activities held in regional Victoria was a 7-a-side football tournament for boys and girls in Bendigo, jointly hosted by the Commission and Football Federation Victoria.

“The unifying effect of football, and sport in general, cannot be undersold, and this will be on clear display in Bendigo this weekend.”

– Maxwell Gratton, Football Federation Victoria CEO



Football Federation Victoria tournament as part of Cultural Diversity Week in Bendigo, March 2017



Moroccan Deli-cacy Women's Iftar Dinner, June 2017

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FUND

The Community Support Fund provided almost \$200,000 to programs for culturally diverse communities in 2016-17. The fund exists to address urgent needs or to finance activities which fall outside of the scope of the Community Grants Program (see page 25). Programs funded included:

- The AMES Heartlands Arts Project, which provided an opportunity for refugee artists and media practitioners to exhibit their work and break into the local industry.
- The Te Ara Hononga Ki Wikitoria International Cultural Wananga, which brought together 150 Maori people for a five-day gathering to discuss language, customs, health, family, history and spirituality.
- A program of camps, religious celebrations and other events for diverse young people living in the City of Hume, which aimed to promote interfaith dialogue and deepen mutual respect.
- The Diasporas in Action conference, which recognised and sought to further the contributions of Victoria's diaspora communities towards international peace-building, development and humanitarian responses.
- Support for the InTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence, which provides holistic and culturally-relevant services to victims and perpetrators.

COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

Objective 4: Promote cooperation between bodies concerned with multicultural affairs and diversity.

MULTIFAITH ADVISORY GROUP

The Multifaith Advisory Group is chaired by the Commission Chairperson and is made up of 27 religious leaders from various Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Baha'i communities.

The Group assists the State Government to understand and appropriately respond to faith-related issues in Victoria, and to support people from a diverse array of cultural and religious backgrounds.

In 2016 a working group was formed in response to recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Royal Commission recommended that a better understanding of faith communities' responses to family violence was needed, and religious leaders' capacity to respond to family violence should be strengthened. The Group has begun consultations with family violence services and religious organisations to progress the Royal Commission's recommendations.



Turbans and Trust demonstrating turban tying to attendees at Victoria's Multicultural Festival, March 2017

A HARMONIOUS VICTORIA

Objective 5: Promote unity, understanding and harmony among Victoria's diverse communities.

Objective 6: Promote a better understanding of Victoria's diverse communities.

Objective 7: Promote interaction between individuals and communities from diverse backgrounds.

SOCIAL COHESION AND THE BENDIGO MOSQUE

Following the controversy over a 2014 proposal to build a mosque in Bendigo, the Commission contracted La Trobe University to research strategies for preventing and mediating conflict related to urban change in multicultural societies.

Bendigo attracted local, national and international attention when a planning application for a mosque sparked anti-Islam rallies, and subsequent counter-rallies opposing the racist sentiment. The protests, which attracted many people from outside of Bendigo, distilled national debates about discrimination, safety, multiculturalism and Australian identity.

The researchers concluded that at the heart of the protests was a desire by participants to play a part in shaping the future of Bendigo. Despite the hostile actions of some involved, the study suggested the incident actually fostered greater intercultural understanding amongst Bendigo residents as they began to learn more about the everyday discrimination some members of the community face.

The report, *Social Cohesion in Bendigo: Understanding Community Attitudes to the Mosque in 2015*, was launched alongside a community conversation in June 2017. The report is also informing the development of a toolkit for local councils to enhance engagement with multicultural communities on urban planning and other issues.

"I would argue that we are seeing a more severe, more acute brand of racism as a result of some communities being linked with acts of terrorism around the world. I would say that without [the protections afforded by Section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975] in place we would face very damaging consequences for our Australian society".

– VMC Chairperson Helen Kapalos speaking at a public hearing of the Federal Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT: PROTECTING 18C

In November 2016 the Federal Government directed Parliament's human rights committee to examine possible changes to the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. The committee was specifically asked to consider section 18C, which makes it unlawful to "offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate" someone on the basis of "race, colour or national or ethnic origin". The following section, 18D, outlines exemptions for artistic works, scientific debate and fair comment on matters of public interest. A significant amount of public debate ensued about the balance between preventing discrimination and preserving free speech.

Based on extensive community consultations and research, the Commission expressed strong opposition to weakening the protections provided by the act, stating that any amendments to sections 18C or 18D should only be made if they strengthened human rights. The Commission's position was validated, with the proposed changes voted down in the Senate in March 2017.

The Commission also defended the human right to religion or belief in a separate submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in April 2017.

ADVOCATING FOR A FEDERAL MULTICULTURAL ACT

In March 2017 the Federal Government established a Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism. The Committee was tasked with investigating whether the principles of multiculturalism should be enshrined in legislation, and whether there was a need for a national multicultural commission.

In its May submission to the Committee, the Commission reiterated the Council of Europe's view that "respect for minorities is a fundamental measure of a country's 'moral progress'", and highlighted the importance of policy in fostering such respect in the community. In June 2017, the Commission Chairperson attended a public hearing in Melbourne to support the submission.

The Committee's final report echoed many of the recommendations made by the Commission, including:

- the development of a federal multicultural act,
- the development of a national human rights and anti-discrimination act,
- the establishment of a national multicultural commission,
- the establishment of a federal body to coordinate settlement, and
- more media cadetships for people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

"When federal and state agencies work together, it is a better integrated model, and it certainly allows... capacity gaps to be better identified. It is very difficult to have that kind of grassroots setting and grassroots activation if there is just a federal body looking after settlement, for example – and it works the same way, I think, with commissions and separate state entities. I think a federal commission would be symbolic in terms of the advantages and leadership that it would put forward as a nation. That is not to be underestimated, because it then brings us into a contemporaneous setting. We have been one of the first countries to adopt a multicultural policy, but I wonder whether we see it in contemporary terms now."

– VMC Chairperson Helen Kapalos speaking at a public hearing of the Select Committee on Strengthening Multiculturalism



Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality Ro Allen shakes hands with Minister for Multicultural Affairs Robin Scott at a VMC-supported LGBTI Multicultural Grants event, September 2016

RELIGIOUS LEADERS DISCUSS LGBTIQ YOUTH

In October 2016, Chairperson Helen Kapalos hosted a multifaith roundtable on LGBTIQ youth in partnership with the Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality, Ro Allen.

Deakin University research on the experiences of young LGBTIQ people of faith in Victoria had highlighted the need to educate and engage with religious leaders in order to reduce discrimination within faith communities. The roundtable attracted 35 participants who first heard from the Deakin researchers, and then broke off into smaller discussion groups.

Participants discussed the importance of openly acknowledging and supporting young LGBTIQ people, emphasising theological teachings about universal acceptance, and equipping religious leaders with the tools and knowledge to support young people who are questioning their sexuality or gender. Participants also heard about and discussed the Victorian Government's role in this space.

The October roundtable was a preliminary discussion that will inform a larger roundtable to be held in early 2017-18.

"This is a subject of equality that I feel most strongly about, and since I know that not all religious people see it as I do, I really want to have my strong support as a religious leader recorded."

– Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black on LGBTIQ rights

DIVERSITY: VICTORIA'S TREASURE

Objective 8: Promote the social, cultural and economic benefits of diversity.

MULTICULTURAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE GROUP

More than 25 ethnic chambers of commerce are active in Victoria, and in 2016-17 the Commission established a Multicultural Chamber of Commerce Group as a forum for collaboration. The inaugural meeting was held in April 2017 and attended by representatives of 11 chambers.

The Group aims to increase economic opportunities for members, assist newly-arrived migrants and refugees with employment opportunities, internships and mentoring, and promote unity and understanding amongst Victoria's diverse business communities.

COMMUNITY GRANTS PROGRAM

Each year the Victorian Government funds multicultural initiatives through the Community Grants Program. Commissioners review applications and endorse those that align with the Commission's objectives. The grants program includes:

Community Harmony Grants for programs such as the Red Cross's *In Search of Safety* program, which teaches school students about the asylum seeker journey and the reasons people seek protection in Australia.

Capacity Building and Participation Grants for initiatives such as increasing diversity in Victoria's emergency services workforce.

Multicultural Festivals and Events Grants for events such as the Bendigo Festival of Cultures, which ran over a week in March 2017 and featured dance and music performances, multicultural food, and a range of discussion forums.

Community Infrastructure and Cultural Precincts Grants for upgrades such as making the Hellenic Museum in the CBD more accessible for older people and people with disabilities.

VMC Chairperson Helen Kapalos and Deputy Chairperson Ross Alatsas attending the inaugural VMC Multicultural Chamber of Commerce meeting, April 2017



CITIZENSHIP: THE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES



Attendees at Victoria's Multicultural Festival, March 2017

Objective 9: Promote the rights and responsibilities of citizenship as a unifying force that strengthens our diverse multicultural community.

COMMISSION OPPOSES PROPOSED CITIZENSHIP CHANGES

In April 2017 the Federal Government proposed a suite of changes to the requirements for Australian citizenship. The Commission strongly opposed the measures and outlined its reasoning in a June submission to the Department of Immigration and Border Protection.

The proposals to raise the English language standards for applicants and require them to provide proof of "integration" were of particular concern to the Commission because of the disproportionate burden they would place on people from multicultural and non-English-speaking backgrounds. The Commission also expressed opposition to the proposal to increase the number of years a citizenship applicant must have held permanent residency.

The Federal Government introduced the changes to Parliament on 15 June, and the bill has since been referred to a Senate inquiry.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY SERVICE

Objective 10: Promote community service as a principle that builds a stronger society.

MULTICULTURAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence honour individuals and organisations for outstanding initiatives that foster cross-cultural understanding and strengthen Victoria's diverse communities. The awards have been running since 2002 and are presented at a ceremony at Government House.

In 2016 the Commission reviewed the award categories to reduce overlap and recognise achievements in new fields, such as youth affairs. Around 170 nominations were received across 12 categories.

Winners included Monica Forson, who received the inaugural Youth Award for her inspiring leadership as co-founder and President of the Afro-Australian Student Organisation. The Premier's Award for Community Harmony went to philanthropists John and Pauline Gandel, while Wyndham City Council received the Community Innovation Award for a program that helped new migrants and refugees to start their own businesses. For the full list of award recipients, see Appendix 2.



2016 Multicultural Youth Award for Excellence recipient Monica Forson with VMC Chairperson Helen Kapalos at Victoria's Multicultural Awards for Excellence, October 2016

"Winning the award was really incredible. I had an outpouring of support on social media, people calling me, congratulating me at work, which was very humbling for me."

– Monica Forson, 2016 Multicultural Youth Award recipient

APPENDIX 1

REGIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The following members were appointed from 1 March 2015 to 28 February 2017, with their term extended until 30 June 2017 due to the realignment of the multicultural affairs portfolio and a review of the Regional Advisory Committees' operational framework.

BARWON SOUTH WEST		EASTERN METROPOLITAN	
Chair:	Dr Teresa De Fazio	Chair:	Chidambaram Srinivasan
Members:	Andrew Alexander Milovan Arandjelovic Eddy Kontelj Michael Martinez Danielle Parker Florio Skratulja Gary Thompson Sally Trigg	Members:	Bright Chinganya Giuseppe Cossari Albert Fatileh Nildhara Gadani Birgit Goetz Rishi Kandel Lizzy Kuoth Chandani Kuruppu Megan Liew Mohamed Mohideen Danny Ong Julie Salomon Tina Stathopoulos
GIPPSLAND		GRAMPIANS	
Chair:	Tsebin Tchen	Chair:	Sonia Vignjevic
Members:	Murphy Singh Aneja Cate Chaiyot Cr Sandy Kam Soula Kanellopoulos Ali Khan Dr Christine Lee Jaeyoung (Jason) Lee J Murray Lobley Brodie Logue Lisa Sinha Dr Ka Chun Tse	Members:	Anne Champness Anne Foley Suzanne Gatz Mona Hatwal Muhammad (Raza) Hussaini Manzoor Mian Meeta Narsi Barry Petrovski Norman Prueter Frances Salenga Frank Williams

HUME		LODDON MALLEE	
Chair:	Dr Mimmie Watts	Chair:	Sam Almaliki
Members:	Barbara Brown Charles Halter Susan Ingleton Vijayakumar (Vijay) Kuttappan Charlene Norton Dr Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe Eugenie Barima Oule Mayssa Powell Brett Sanderson Rashidi Sumaili Dean Williams	Members:	Dr Antonio Alessi Peter Bryne Noemi Cummings Angela Curthoys Susan Denny Stuart Gillespie Kaye Graves Jill Joslyn Mary Ruane–St Clair Winifred Scott Sudesh Tiwari
NORTH WEST METROPOLITAN		SOUTHERN METROPOLITAN	
Acting Chair:	Tina Hosseini	Chair:	Grahame J Leonard AM (resigned Jan 2017)
Members:	Romany Amarasingham Antonio Bentincontri Kathy Brunton Cr Gautam Gupta Joseph Haweil Cr Bo Li Yadata Saba Ezgi Sahin Dr Anjali Tikoo Marisa Vedar Bom Yonzon	Acting Chairs:	Tina Hosseini Srini Srinivasan Sonia Vignjevic
		Members:	Cr Roz Blades Eric Cheng Chandra Shekhar Kamat Wilhem Morgan Nason Mwanza Sam Navarra Marco Nazzaro Iman Riman Zuben Rustomsee Jennifer Semple Sharon Sykes Claude Ullin Sarah Williams

APPENDIX 2

VICTORIA'S 2016 MULTICULTURAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE RECIPIENTS

Multicultural Honour Roll

Winner: Nazer Nazir

Highly Commended: Julien Leyre

Premier's Award for Community Harmony

Winners: John Gandel AO and Pauline Gandel

Ambassador Award

Winner: Lella Cariddi

Highly Commended: Asian Australian Alliance

Media Award

Winner: Luke Waters

Local Government Award

Winner: City of Greater Dandenong

Highly Commended: Manningham City Council

Commended: Yarra City Council

Education and Early Childhood Award

Winner: Dandenong West Primary School

Victoria Police Annual Multicultural Award

Winner: Sergeant Taner Yavuzcan

Highly Commended: Sergeant Ben McWilliam

Commended: Sergeant William Holmes

Victoria Police Multicultural Media Award

Winners: ND3 Family Violence Team, Family Violence Command and Media Unit Proactive Team

Highly Commended: Victoria Police Cricket Club

Commended: Acting Sergeant Ricardo Anderson and Stephanie Garak

Protective Service Officer Multicultural Award

Winner: Protective Services Officer Kur Theik

Highly Commended: Protective Services Officer Humayun Wafajo

Commended: Protective Services Officer Supervisor Paul Fassoulis

Victoria Police Community Exemplary Award

Winner: El Sedeaq Mosque

Highly Commended: Lisa Sinha

Commended: Bendigo Police

Community Innovation Award

Winner: Wyndham City Council

Highly Commended: Dianella Health

Youth Award

Winner: Monica Forson

Corporate Innovation Award

Winner: St Vincent's Hospital

Highly Commended: Gateway Health

Award for Meritorious Service to the Community – Volunteer

Winner: Barbara Brown

Highly Commended: Deepa Rai

Commended: Dr Sylwia Greda-Bogusz

Award for Meritorious Service to the Community – Paid Work

Winner: Jenny Semple

Award for Meritorious Service to the Community – Organisation

Winner: Casey Multifaith Network

Highly Commended: Hindu Society of Victoria

APPENDIX 3

COMMUNITY SUPPORT FUND RECIPIENTS

PROJECT	ORGANISATION	AMOUNT
Alexander the Great: Pioneering Multiculturalism project	Australian Institute of Macedonian Studies	\$5,000
AMES Heartland 2017	AMES Australia	\$10,000
Argentinean celebration of the Day of Respect of Cultural Diversity	Centro Argentino de Victoria	\$3,000
ASC Eastern Carols by Candle Light	Australian Syrian Charity	\$2,500
Assyrian Martyrs Day Commemoration	Victorian Assyrian Organisations Events Committee	\$1,200
Australia Day Celebration	Gambella Community of Australia	\$1,500
Australian Labour Day: Street Soccer Tournament	African-Australian Multicultural Employment and Youth Services	\$2,000
Australian Multicultural Eid Festival	Australian Muslim Council	\$10,000
Bastille Day French Festival	Bastille Day French Festival Inc.	\$10,000
CALDPlay	Western Bulldogs Community Foundation	\$5,000
Chile: Cueca y Sabor	Australian Multicultural Alliance	\$5,000
City Sisters: Sport and Leadership for Young Women and Girls	Melbourne City Football Club	\$5,000
Dari Language and Culture Program	Hume Afghan Association	\$5,000
Embracing Diversity: Community Quilt Project	Brentwood Park Neighbourhood House	\$2,000
Diasporas in Action Conference	Diaspora Action Australia	\$5,000
Information day	Laziali nel Mondo Australia	\$1,000
FUSE 2016	Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network	\$2,500
Gara and batik tie-dye workshop	Kontiki Cultural Women Empowerment	\$2,500
Haig Fawkner Cricket Club Iftar Dinner	Haig Fawkner Cricket Club	\$1,350
Hoop Stars Youth Empowerment Program	Hoopin	\$5,000
Identity and Culture in Multicultural Australia: Youth Camp	Multicultural Youth Centre	\$8,000

PROJECT	ORGANISATION	AMOUNT
IndianCare: Connecting and Culturally Responsive	IndianCare	\$3,000
Interaction with ethno-specific organisations on addressing family violence	inTouch Multicultural Centre Against Family Violence	\$3,000
Interfaith Sports Invitational	The Islamic Schools of Victoria (Werribee College)	\$6,000
ISCV introductory meet-and-greet dinner	Shia Council Of Victoria	\$7,500
National Mosque Open Day 2016	Werribee Islamic Centre	\$7,500
New Change: South Sudanese Young Women's Short Film Project	Brimbank City Council	\$1,632
The Lyres of Greece music and dance concert	Pancretan Association of Melbourne	\$5,000
Remembrance and celebration of the 54th anniversary of Ugandan Independence	Uganda the Pearl of Africa Victoria Association	\$3,000
Social connection and empowerment activities	Persian Hope Community	\$6,000
South Sudanese Australian National Basketball Association National Classic	Basketball Victoria	\$4,700
Speed Date a Muslim Iftar Dinner	Moroccan Deli-cacy	\$8,700
International Cultural Wananga (Gathering)	Te Ara Hononga Ki Wikitoria	\$10,000
The HIN Youth: Faith, Community and Belonging Project	Hume City Council	\$10,000
The Role of Public Libraries in a Multicultural Nation	Swinburne University of Technology	\$9,900
The Social Studio Block Party 2017	The Social Studio	\$10,000
International Day of Yoga	Vasudeva Kriya Yoga	\$1,000
Ventana Fiesta 2017	Chiquitines Cultural Workshop	\$5,000
Weekly meetings and community support activities	Multicultural Association of Russian Speaking Women	\$2,500

This page: The crowd at Culture Waves concert, March 2017

Back cover: Remi at Culture Waves concert, March 2017



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Annual report 2016-17

The 2016-17 Annual Report covers the core work of the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and its achievements within the context of its objectives and functions, as outlined in the *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*.

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