

June Newsletter 2023

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Australian Government



Ethnic Communities Council
of Western Australia Inc.

A Historic Moment: Join Us in Supporting the Voice Referendum

An Unprecedented Epoch: Stand with Us in Advancing the Voice Referendum Australia stands on the brink of a significant milestone – the impending Voice Referendum. This critical event marks our earnest journey towards genuine reconciliation and recognition of our First Peoples. Drawing inspiration from the momentous 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, the referendum paves the way for a potentially transformative constitutional shift, grounded on the pillars of Voice, Treaty, and Truth.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the ancient custodians of this land, have long embodied the spirit of inclusion and camaraderie, welcoming a diverse range of ethnic communities and enriching Australia's multicultural tapestry. Now, on the eve of this constitutional decision, it's our turn to reflect this respect and recognition.

Casting a 'Yes' vote in the referendum is more than a mere approval. It symbolizes a robust affirmation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' history, culture, and their invaluable contributions to Australia's societal fabric. It reinforces their status as the original inhabitants and stewards of this land, the backbone of modern Australia.



Furthermore, this referendum attests to Australia's commitment to fostering equal representation for all cultures within our society.

Promoting the Voice Referendum signifies our respect for, and recognition of, the unique rights of Indigenous people as the First Australians.

While acknowledging the diversity of opinions and empathizing with those who may vote differently, our position remains firm: a vote for the Voice Referendum signifies a leap towards a more equitable, harmonious, and culturally diverse Australia. Our commitment was exemplified at last year's Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) conference where over 900 delegates endorsed the Uluru Statement.

We are particularly focused on raising awareness about the referendum within our multicultural communities, illuminating the significance of Voice, Treaty, and Truth. We extend our gratitude to Minister Anne Aly, Senator Sue Lines, the Yes23 Campaign, and the WA Labor Party for their guidance in this endeavour. We pledge to continue nurturing open and respectful dialogue between our diverse communities and First Peoples.

This referendum offers an extraordinary opportunity to champion significant structural changes for our First Peoples. On the precipice of this historical moment, we call on all our members to join us in shaping a meaningful and enduring legacy. Let's unite on this journey towards authentic reconciliation, building a foundation for an equitable and truthful Australia that future generations can appreciate and cherish.

In this transformative journey, we have seen leaders stepping forward with optimism and resolve. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has expressed confidence in the success of the referendum. He emphasized that the initiative was born out of community discussions, particularly those involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in the run-up to the 2017 constitutional convention held at Uluru. His conviction that this is a grassroots campaign underscores its potential as a catalyst for national unity. In the same spirit, Linda Burney, the new Minister for Indigenous Australians, has actively campaigned to garner support for the referendum. She has spoken passionately about the Uluru Statement from the Heart, describing it as a generous invitation to all Australians to walk hand in hand with First Nations peoples. Meanwhile, WA Labor Senator Pat Dodson echoed these sentiments, asserting that recognizing and enshrining a Voice would significantly enhance our nation.

Our shared vision of establishing a Voice for the First Peoples in our governance structures has also been echoed at a state level. Mark McGowan who served as the former Premier of Western Australia, has said that the outcome of the national referendum could influence the creation of a similar Voice to the WA Parliament. His administration had previously amended the WA constitution to acknowledge WA's Aboriginal people as the state's original inhabitants and traditional custodians of the land. This demonstrates a steadfast commitment to reconciliation and paves the way for more inclusive political structures.

Together, we can spark a change. Let's make this referendum count, not just as a vote, but as a pivotal affirmation of Australia's multicultural identity and our shared future.



What is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?
Get informed at [Voice.gov.au](https://www.voice.gov.au)

Australian Government

Get informed.
[Voice.gov.au](https://www.voice.gov.au)

We are keen to hear your thoughts. Please contact eo@eccwa.org.au if you would like to discuss your community's input into this matter



"Community Corner is Back! Ready to spotlight the lively events and inspiring stories from our community. We're eager to celebrate your contributions. Have an event or news to share? We'd love to hear from you. Reach out to us via email at admin@eccwa.org.au . Let's continue shaping our vibrant and connected community together!"

Upcoming activities:

Get the facts about voice - Community Information Session

2023 Community Network Forum Feedback and Roadmap - Community Session

Dr Leela De Mel Centre

New laws to tackle online misinformation and disinformation - Community Information Session

Work restrictions for student visa holders - What is the impact?

15% wage increase for the Aged Care Sector - what is the impact?

A Tapestry of Cultures ECCWA Welcomes FECCA to Western Australia



This month, we at the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (ECCWA) were delighted to host the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA) in our vibrant state.

It was a gathering of diversity, a celebration of cultures that highlighted the rich tapestry that makes Australia such a unique nation.

We proudly showcased the stunning diversity within our borders, with the Oromo, Indian, Iranian, Vietnamese, and Arabic communities, alongside Farsi-speaking members from the Alnoor community, stepping forward to extend a warm welcome to FECCA. Our shared experiences, stories, and visions for a multicultural Australia added depth to our interactions, serving as a testament to the strength and unity of our diverse communities.

ECCWA would like to express heartfelt gratitude to each community that took part in this unforgettable visit. Your participation was a celebration of the vibrant spirit of multiculturalism that ECCWA is committed to fostering and championing. We eagerly anticipate future collaborations with FECCA and our multicultural communities, as we continue our journey towards an increasingly inclusive Australia.

This event was not simply a visit—it was an exhibition of the unity in diversity that makes our state, and indeed our country, a kaleidoscope of cultures. It was a tangible demonstration of shared values, mutual respect, and the strength of our multicultural society.



FINDING FREEDOM



Every year, Refugee Week stands as a beacon of hope and solidarity for individuals displaced by conflict and persecution. It raises awareness about the struggles and triumphs of refugees, binding us together in a national celebration of our shared humanity. In 2023, we find ourselves rallying around a profound and evocative theme: "Finding Freedom".

Australia's ethnic communities, a vibrant tapestry woven from diverse backgrounds and cultures, are strongly committed to supporting and amplifying the message of Refugee Week. The theme of "Finding Freedom" resonates deeply with us, reminding us of our own historical narratives of struggle, survival, and the pursuit of a better life.

What does "freedom" truly mean? The absence of fear, the preservation of human rights, living without persecution, the equality of opportunities - these aspects encapsulate the essence of freedom. Every day, millions embark on perilous journeys, driven by the primal need for safety and liberty. The refugee experience often represents a poignant quest for freedom – a quest that takes them across borders and vast oceans, to unfamiliar lands like Australia.

As individuals who have also navigated cultural transitions, we empathize with the trials and tribulations of finding a new home, a new career, or forming new friendships in an alien environment. Yet, in these challenges lie the potential for immense growth, resilience, and the ability to dream anew. We see reflections of our own experiences in their journey, making our support for Refugee Week 2023 all the more meaningful. Previous themes of Refugee Week, including "Healing," "Unity," "Year of Welcome," and "#WithRefugees," to name a few, have each painted a unique facet of the refugee narrative.



This year, "Finding Freedom" brings a fresh perspective, emphasising the refugees' indomitable spirit in the pursuit of freedom and the opportunities that unfold once they find it.

As part of the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia, we are proud to support the Refugee Week 2023. We encourage everyone to make the most of the resources available on the Refugee Week website to participate in events that shed light on the journey towards freedom. Let's come together to demonstrate compassion, celebrate resilience, and acknowledge the invaluable contributions refugees make to our multicultural society.

In celebrating Refugee Week, we not only honour the resilience of refugees but also reinforce our shared commitment to building a world where freedom isn't a dream but a reality. We look forward to joining hands with you all in this celebration, because, in our diversity, we find our strength, and in our unity, we find our freedom.

ECCWA Board Members attended community events to mark Refugee Week 2023



Multicultural Framework Review : Preliminary Scope of Examination



Preamble

The cultural and linguistic fabric of Australia has never been more diverse, as attested by the 2021 census, revealing that over half of the Australian populace are either immigrants or have at least one parent born overseas. Furthermore, a significant 22.8% of the population communicates in a language other than English within their homes. The continual influx of global citizens adds a rich palette of backgrounds, experiences, abilities, and unique strengths, augmenting Australia's dynamic cultural mosaic. An inclusive Australia, devoid of barriers and fostering equal service to all, is pivotal in realizing the nation's ultimate potential and establishing itself as a global front-runner in the post-pandemic world.

Australia, over time, has built a robust legacy of successful multiculturalism rooted in the appreciation and celebration of our nation's diversity. In 1973, Australia's multicultural policy acknowledged the advantages of cultural diversity and embarked on a journey to shape a just, inclusive, and socially cohesive society. This path was navigated on the bedrock of a bipartisan vision and a well-coordinated policy framework, led by the Office of Multicultural Affairs established in 1986.

Now, fifty years forward, as Australia continues to embrace a dynamic surge of immigrants, the federal multicultural policy framework has not been accorded the focus it merits. The inability of policy frameworks and service delivery models to evolve and address the multicultural population's necessities has led to relatively poorer social, economic, and health outcomes. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the severe consequences of a disjointed and feeble approach to maintaining the systems and frameworks crucial to upholding multiculturalism. Reflecting on the pandemic's aftermath and Australia's escalating diversity, the country cannot afford to overlook the potential benefits of a holistic governmental approach to multiculturalism, nor the risks posed by a disjointed one.

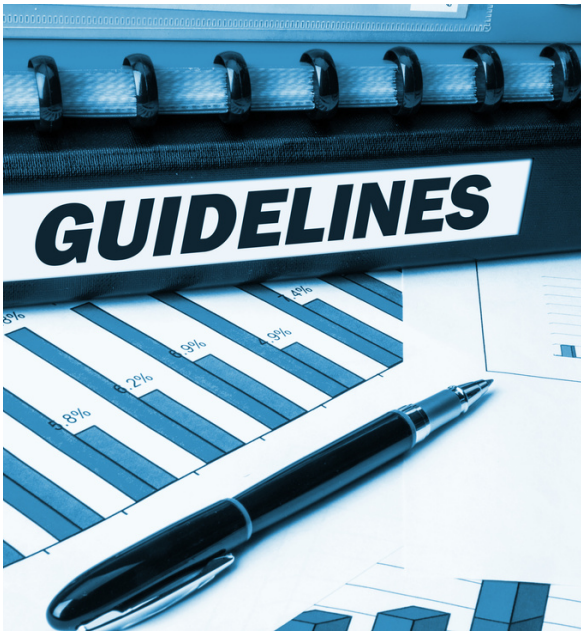


Prospects for Transformation

The government's proclamation of the Multicultural Framework Review is a welcome development. It provides an avenue to evaluate current institutional arrangements and policy guidelines concerning multiculturalism and to offer advice to the government on the essential parameters to fortify Australia's multicultural fabric over the forthcoming decade.

To preserve Australia's successful multicultural heritage and establish a prosperous future where everyone can belong and thrive equally, a robust and synchronized whole-of-government approach is indispensable. We anticipate the review to culminate in powerful, effective, and inclusive multicultural policy and institutional configurations at the Commonwealth Government level, supported by a national dedication to multiculturalism with robust bipartisan backing. The review must be comprehensive and engage meaningfully with multicultural communities' inaccessible ways to unlock the full potential of diverse cultures, languages, life experiences, skills, and strengths.





Guidelines for the Review

For the successful design and execution of the Review, we propose the following considerations to ensure the development of responsive institutional and policy settings catering to Australia's diversity

The principles of 'diversity within diversity' and 'intersectionality' should form the crux of the review process and outcomes. It is essential to recognize that multicultural individuals or communities often face discrimination and disadvantages impacted by multiple identity markers such as age, gender, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, and visa status. The interplay of these identities often results in compounded disadvantages, not due to the diverse identities themselves, but systemic exclusion, creating deep-rooted forms of disadvantage. The review should explore how current and future multicultural policies, frameworks, and strategies intersect with other federal policies, frameworks, and strategies.

The review should analyse national shortcomings in collecting data around cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. The development of consistent and accurate measures of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is critical for obtaining comprehensive, relevant, accessible, and valuable data. This will ensure the research truly reflects Australia's cultural diversity and is useful for the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs.



The review should engage with communities in a meaningful, effective, and inclusive manner, and should be allocated adequate resources to do so. Community engagement should extend beyond traditional community consultations and public submissions to reach underserved communities often left unheard.

Proposed Adjustments to the Draft Terms of Reference

We support the draft Terms of Reference, proposing the following amendments

ToR item 1

The efficacy of existing federal legislative and regulatory frameworks, policy settings and programs, interactions with communities, and services designed to support multicultural Australia needs to be considered. This includes their interaction with state and local government settings.

ToR item 2

The roles and functions of government and non-government organizations need to be evaluated, considering appropriate relationships between them for effective planning and provision of programs and services to multicultural communities.

ToR item 3

The effectiveness of current federal diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies should be evaluated to ensure that the Australian Public Service workforce mirrors multicultural Australia.

ToR item 4

Identifying areas for reform to address any systemic barriers preventing people from multicultural communities from participating in Australian society, including second-generation plus migrants.

Additionally, we propose a further Term of Reference to identify the effectiveness of current diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies that are being implemented by state and territory governments to explore what can be adopted for implementation federally.

As WA's peak body for ethnic organisations, ECCWA is dedicated to advocating for cultural understanding and inclusivity. ECCWA welcomes the Government's Multicultural Framework Review. We look forward to actively participating in the consultation process, contributing our diverse experiences and insights. We are confident that our involvement will support the creation of an inclusive framework that truly reflects Australia's multicultural society.

Proposed Abortion Reforms in Western Australia: Assessing Impact on Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities



Trigger Warning! The following material contains Abortion-related content, Reproductive health discussions, Cultural sensitivities and Stigma and societal attitudes

The recent introduction of contemporary abortion laws by the Cook Government in Western Australia has significant implications for culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities across the state. While the media statement highlights the overwhelming community and medical practitioner support for these reforms, it is important to consider the potential cultural sensitivities and varying cultural backgrounds of Western Australians when assessing the impact of such legislation.



One key aspect of the proposed reforms is the removal of abortion from the Criminal Code, recognizing that abortion care is part of everyday healthcare for women. This change is likely to be welcomed by CaLD communities, as it reduces the stigma and criminalization associated with abortion. In many cultural contexts, discussions around reproductive health and abortion can be sensitive and taboo. By decriminalizing abortion, the Cook Government aims to provide fair, equal, and timely access to legal medical services for all women in Western Australia, including those from CaLD backgrounds.

The proposed amendments also aim to address the inequity of access to abortion services. This is particularly relevant for CaLD communities, as women in regional and remote areas often face challenges in accessing primary care providers and timely healthcare services.



By removing clinically unnecessary barriers and reducing the number of health practitioners involved in care, the government seeks to ensure that all women, regardless of their geographic location or cultural background, have equal access to safe and accessible abortion services. Engaged with diverse cultural groups. This would help capture their perspectives, concerns, and needs regarding the proposed abortion reforms.

Additionally, healthcare professionals who serve CaLD communities should be equipped with cultural competence training to address any potential challenges that may arise in providing abortion services. Sensitivity towards diverse cultural beliefs, values, and practices is vital to ensure that women from CaLD backgrounds receive respectful and appropriate care throughout the process.

In conclusion, the Cook Government's introduction of contemporary abortion laws in Western Australia marks a significant moment for women in the state, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. While the reforms aim to improve healthcare access and remove barriers for all women, it is important to acknowledge the varying cultural sensitivities and backgrounds of CaLD communities and address them in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways.



Culturally sensitive information, translation and interpreting services, and cultural competency training for healthcare providers are crucial to ensure that the needs of these communities are understood, respected, and met throughout the implementation of the proposed legislation. By taking these measures, the Cook Government can strive towards achieving fair, equal, and culturally appropriate healthcare for all Western Australian women.

We are keen to hear your thoughts. Please contact eo@eccwa.org.au if you would like to discuss your community's input into this matter

Navigating the 2023-24 Federal Budget: What It Means for Refugee and Humanitarian Programs



Overview

The 2023-24 federal budget fails to clarify the size of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program, leaving room for a potential announcement in June. The proposed budget for offshore processing stands at \$1.65 billion for the forecasted period, despite having around 30 people left in Nauru. Border management and enforcement expenditure continues to overshadow humanitarian settlement costs by over twice the amount. However, a ray of hope emerges as the five-year limit on access to settlement support is eliminated, extending help to those who need it.



Humanitarian Program

Contrary to speculation about a potential increase in the Refugee and Humanitarian Program in line with Labor's promise, the 2023-24 budget has not yet disclosed any future plans. It was expected that an announcement regarding the 2023-24 program size would come after community consultations concluded on May 31. As of now, the annual program continues to offer 17,875 places, maintaining last year's level. Updates will be provided as new information becomes available. Despite the shift in terminology from a "planning ceiling" to a "planning target", thousands of spots were left vacant between 2019-20 and 2021-22, suggesting a mismatch between budget allocation and actual delivery.

Settlement Services

The five-year eligibility cap for services under the SETS Program, National Community Hubs Program, and Youth Transition Support services has been removed. This aims to provide ongoing aid to refugees and migrants in Australia beyond five years, assuming they have unresolved settlement needs.

The budget has allocated \$9.1 million to continue the Youth Transition Support services for the following year, hoping to boost employment outcomes for young refugees and migrants. Additionally, a revised delivery model for the Adult Migrant English Program is set to roll out in 2025 to enhance language proficiency, employment, and settlement outcomes for migrants.

Onshore Detention and Compliance

The 2023-24 budget for onshore detention and compliance shows a rise to over \$1.365 billion, marking an increase of \$74 million from the previous year. More than \$1.1 billion is budgeted for detention and compliance for each of the three years of the forward estimates.

Offshore Processing

Despite having only around 30 people left on Nauru, offshore processing is projected to cost \$1.5 billion through to 2026-27. From July 2012 to June 2024, the Australian Government has spent \$12 billion on offshore processing. There is potential risk in meeting the performance measure of resettling 95% of the 150 refugees from offshore processing to New Zealand this year.



Border Surveillance and Management

Border Enforcement and Border Management spending has topped \$1.67 billion in the last year, twice as much as spending on Refugee, Humanitarian, and Migrant Settlement Services. A similar budget of \$1.665 billion is allocated for the coming year.

Health and Torture and Trauma Services

The 2023-24 budget assigns \$136 million over four years (and \$36 million ongoing) for the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, aimed at supporting the mental health of survivors before they relocate to Australia on humanitarian grounds. Several other health allocations are provided, including a \$4.7 million investment in partnering with community leaders, educators, service providers, and health experts to bolster vaccinations.

Women's Safety

The government plans to extend the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot to January 2025, and commit \$10 million to expand the family violence provisions within the Migration Regulations 1994 to include most permanent visa subclasses.

Administrative Review System

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Permanent Visas for TPV and SHEV Holders

Refugees on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) will be offered a permanent Resolution of Status visa. However, the transition is expected to increase payments for government services and benefits by \$732.5 million over 5 years from 2022–23.

Migration Program

For the 2023–24 permanent Migration Program, the government plans to return the planning level to 190,000 places, with 70 per cent of those places allocated to the Skill stream.

Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship

A slightly reduced budget of \$124.47 million is allocated to Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship in the next fiscal year, compared to \$130.39 million spent in 2022-23.

Anti-Slavery Commissioner

An Anti-Slavery Commissioner will be established with a funding of \$8.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24.

Overseas Humanitarian and Development Assistance

Australia's baseline Overseas Development Assistance funding has increased slightly from \$3.991 billion spent in 2022-23 to \$4.075 billion allocated in 2023-24. However, Australia's overseas development assistance in 2023-24 will be 0.19% of gross national income, a historic low.



Conclusions

Analysis of the 2023-24 federal budget indicates that while there are positive measures, such as the elimination of the five-year limit on settlement support, there remain issues to be addressed. Despite a dramatic cut in the number of offshore detainees, the projected cost of offshore processing remains high. Additionally, the spending on border enforcement continues to significantly outpace that of humanitarian settlement. The lack of information on the size of the Refugee and Humanitarian Program raises concerns about the future of this critical support network. Overall, it remains uncertain whether this budget can adequately meet the emerging needs of refugees and those seeking humanitarian protection. Further communication from the government regarding these issues is eagerly awaited.

We are keen to hear your thoughts. Please contact eo@eccwa.org.au if you would like to discuss your community's input into this matter

ECCWA Welcomes Acting Executive Officer Baily Fernandez and farewells Executive Officer



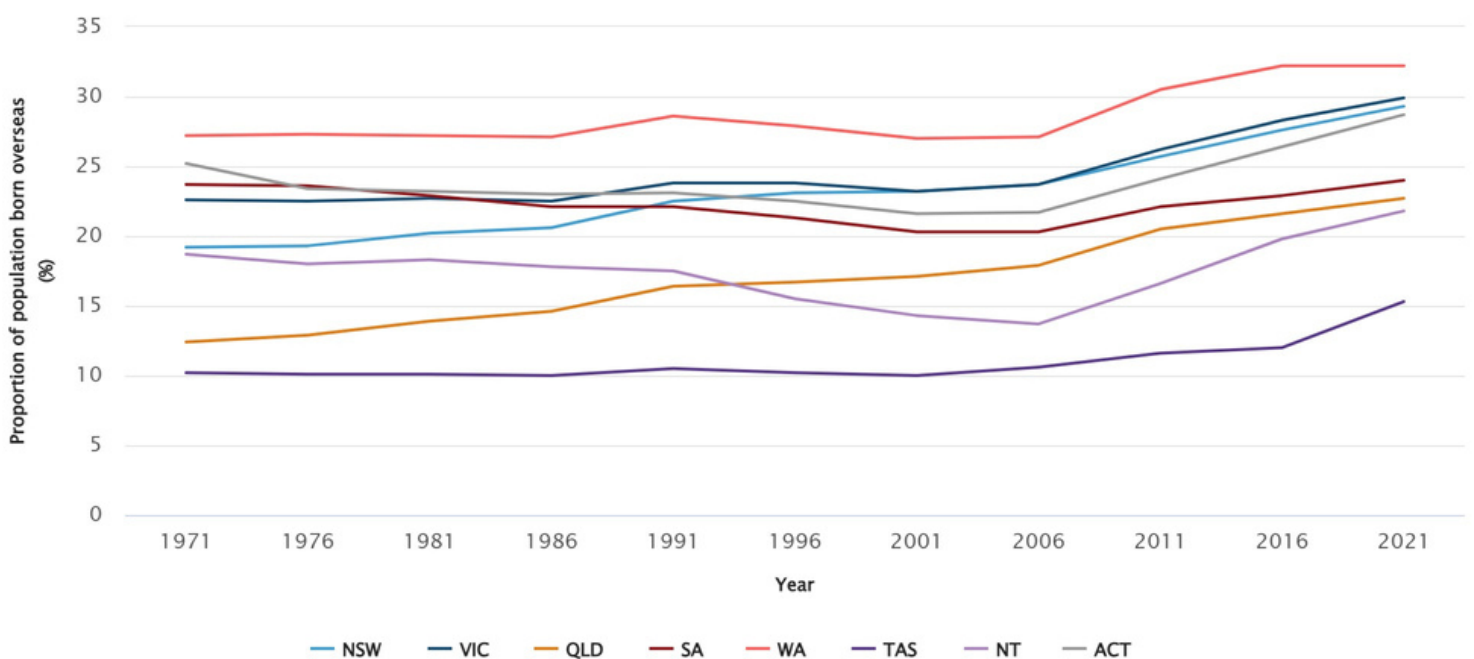
Mrs Vivienne Pillay, the Executive Officer of the Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA) retired on 16th June 2023 and the ECCWA Board and staff would like to thank her for her leadership and wish her all the best. The Board appointed Baily Fernandez as the Acting Executive Officer. Baily is a Certified Practising Accountant (CPA Australia) with several years of C-Suite experience in commercial and not for profit sectors. Baily is well known within the CaLD community and has served on the ECCWA Board. Baily said, "I am enthusiastically stepping into the role and am keen to build on our organisation's illustrious past, serving our vibrant and diverse community. I look forward to foster unity, amplify our unique stories, and instil a spirit of resilience and progress that mirrors our collective cultural heritage. Together, we will advance the legacy of ECCWA while shaping a promising future."

Ms. Yaso Ponnuthurai, President of the Ethnic Communities Council of WA (ECCWA) has resigned as of 01st June 2023 and as per Rule 28(B) of the ECCWA Constitution, the Senior Vice President, Ms. Mamta Kochhar, shall carry out all duties of the President until a new President can be elected at the next AGM. Ms Kochhar has been part of the ECCWA Board for the past 3 years and served in the capacity of Vice President Women's Interests before taking on the role of Senior Vice President in October 2022



Did you know?

Proportion of population born overseas by state and territory, 2021



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cultural diversity of Australia 20/09/2022

Since 2006, the proportion of individuals born overseas has risen across all Australian states and territories. As of 2021, Western Australia leads the pack with 32.2% of its population originating from other countries, a trend observed for the past 50 years. Despite accounting for just 10.5% of Australia's total population, Western Australia is home to substantial portions of the Australian population born in various countries. This includes 32.1% of the country's Zimbabwean-born residents, 26.2% from Singapore, 23.7% from South Africa, and 22.4% from Ireland. Therefore, Western Australia demonstrates a notably diverse population, attracting migrants from all over the world.