



Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) Inc.

ABN 55662738508

Multicultural Voice of ACT

Chair: Dr Madhumita IYENGAR

Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, Function Room, Level 2

Eighteenth (18th) Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 19th November 2024

CMCF Annual Report (Dec 2023- Nov 2024)

Presented by Chair, Dr Madhumita IYENGAR

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the country, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri People, and recognise any other people or families with a connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We recognise their continuing culture and the contributions they made to the life of this city and this region. We pay respects to their elders, past and present.

We also acknowledge all the members of our diverse multicultural communities who have made Australia their home, the rich cultures and heritage these people have brought to this country and for the contributions they make to the social fabric of Australia. We are all proud to be Australian as we embrace and celebrate the success of Australia as a multicultural society.

FROM THE CHAIR

It is an honour for me to welcome you all and present the Executive's Annual Report as the CMCF Chair at this Eighteenth Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 19 November at the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, Canberra.

It has been 18 years since the inception of the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) Inc. We have kept up our strong commitment to continue to work with our membership towards providing strong leadership and act as the Multicultural Voice of ACT.

As an effective peak community organisation, we currently have 90 financial membership representing diverse ethnic community organisations of ACT and 18 individual members and 2 life memberships. I wish to thank and acknowledge our members for their continuous strong support to CMCF.

My role as the new Chair of CMCF started off with a community consultation on a topic of national interest, racism experience of the culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Australia, supported by a grant from the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia. I highly appreciate the support given to me by the CMCF Executive Committee and the larger ACT community on delivering this much needed CMCF consultation activities successfully.



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ABOUT US

Canberra Multicultural Community Forum Inc. (CMCF) is dedicated to fostering a fair, inclusive, and harmonious Canberra that celebrates cultural diversity in all its forms, including multilingualism and interfaith collaboration. Our core values—respect, justice, integrity, and diversity—guide everything we do.

With over 110 ethnic community organisations and associates as members, CMCF embodies the collective strength and unwavering support of Canberra's multicultural communities. This robust network empowers us to fulfill our role as a leading voice for multiculturalism, ensuring that the rich tapestry of cultures in Australia is positively represented and celebrated nationwide.

As advocates for the ACT multicultural community, CMCF actively engages with government bodies at both local and national levels, collaborating with key National Peak Advisory bodies to secure meaningful outcomes that benefit Canberra's diverse communities.

WHAT WE DO

CMCF's Executive Committee meets monthly—both online and in person—to address issues affecting the ACT's multicultural communities. Through these discussions, we develop strategies and actions that ensure we remain a steadfast representative for multicultural voices in policy discussions and community forums.

Our efforts focus on responding to public policies, preparing impactful submissions, and voicing the priorities and concerns of our communities. This work strengthens our role as a proactive and dynamic advocate for multicultural interests.

OUR FOCUS

CMCF is committed to fostering an inclusive community through targeted communication, advocacy and active support for multicultural organisations. Key areas of focus include:

- **Supporting Multicultural Communities:** Addressing the needs and concerns of migrants, refugees, and established multicultural groups.
- **Health and Well-Being:** Promoting health literacy, advocating for mental health support, and addressing the unique needs of multicultural seniors and women.
- **Access to Services:** Ensuring equitable access to essential services and addressing government policy issues impacting multicultural communities.
- **Community Language:** Supporting the Community Language activities in ACT and providing inputs on the development of ACT Language policies in schools.



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We achieve these goals by participating in and hosting community events, forums, and consultations. This approach allows us to amplify the voices of our communities and address critical issues, including:

- National Multicultural Framework
 - Human Rights and Anti-Racism Initiatives
 - Promoting Community language and Multilingual Education
 - Health Literacy and Health Initiatives
 - Multicultural Senior Wellbeing and Aged Care Support (including Advance Care Planning)
 - Review of the Migration Program
 - Climate Change Adaptation Strategies
 - Legislative matters such as the Multiculturalism Bill and End of Life Bill
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Building Capacity and Recognition

With the vital support of the ACT Government through grant funding, CMCF continues to strengthen its capabilities. These resources enable us to:

- Assist and support community organisations effectively.
- Disseminate timely and relevant information to our members.
- Expand our outreach and advocacy efforts.

The ACT Government's recognition of CMCF as a peak multicultural body underscores the importance of our work. Together, we strive to ensure the voices of Canberra's multicultural communities are heard, respected, and valued across government agencies, organisations, and the broader Australian society.

CMCF KEY EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

FECCA – CMCF partnership involvement – December 2023 to June 2024

During the pandemic time, we have witnessed the increased incidences of racial abuses, experienced by many community groups and individuals. We use the opportunity to focus on a critical issue impacting our multicultural communities adversely – **Racism Experience and Impacts**, aligned with CMCF involvement with *It Stops With Me* campaign.

We continued with our campaign against racism and were successful in obtaining two competitive FECCA project funding to conduct multicultural community consultations to inform the development of the National Anti-Racism Framework:



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- CMCF conducted its **first Racism Experience consultation forum** successfully with members from ACT's multicultural communities on 10 December 2023 and a summary report was submitted to FECCA.
- CMCF had its first public Symposium on **Racism Experience of CALD Communities in ACT: Issues, Impacts and Action** in May 2024. It was not only highly successful in bringing together diverse multicultural community perspectives, it also established its partnership with academia like ANU and UC and a national multicultural organisation like Diversity Council Australia, along with strengthening its existing association with ACT Human Rights Commission.
- CMCF developed the **first evidence base on racism experience of and impacts on ACT's CALD community members** through a primary survey, which can provide much needed policy inputs related to mitigating racism incidence and developing anti-racism strategies.
- The Symposium report was submitted to FECCA which was appreciated and acknowledged by FECCA. Currently, CMCF is poised to have its **first published report** (on Racism Experience of ACT's CALD community, *with FECCA approval*) in 2025, for which we have received pre-release high interest from several organisations, including National Library of Australia.
- CMCF attended **FECCA Annual Conference 2024** in October this year with a presentation by Chair Dr Madhumita IYENGAR on **Collective Impact Action (CIA) – A Way to Go For Multicultural Communities**, which created wide interests and engagements with many potential external stakeholders at the conference. The presentation included the work of Initiatives For Women In Need Inc (IWIn) as IWIn developed ACT's first **Collective Impact Action Plan** in 2018-19, funded by an ACT Government Grant.

National Multicultural Festival CMCF Information Stall Feb 2024

CMCF held a multicultural information stall at the festival, providing an opportunity for our members to display their activities and event information. We also distributed service provider information and conducted bi-language fun activities for school children.

In collaboration with **ACT Bilingual Education Alliance (ACTBEA)**, CMCF ran a language taster workshop at our information stall at the 2024 National Multicultural Festival (NMF). Comprising fun six 20-minute sessions for children and adults featuring French, Italian, Sinhala, Swahili, Serbian, Japanese and Welsh, the workshop was led by CMCF Committee members Dr Mandy Scott and Dr Wambui Mathenge that helped raise awareness and interest in some of Canberra's many languages, gave speakers a chance to showcase their skills, and highlighted the links between language/s and culture/s.



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2024 Community Service Awards

CMCF introduced **Community Service Awards** this year jointly with the Canberra Rotary Club. These awards recognise High Achievers in the Canberra and Region who volunteer their time offering services to the community with significant positive impacts. CMCF presented its **first 2024 Community Service Award** to Aleksander Gancarz OAM on 19 May in a Peace Bell Ceremony organised jointly with the Canberra Rotary Club, for his three decades long dedicated volunteer services to ACT's multicultural communities, particularly the Polish community.

Multicultural Voice of ACT Radio program – 2XX Community Radio FM98.3

CMCF continued to organise a weekly program 'Canberra Multicultural Voices' on 2XX Community Radio. Broadcast on Mondays between 12noon to 12.30. The aim of this program is to celebrate Canberra's multicultural community, highlight their activities and concerns, and discuss issues of interest for and about multiculturalism in the ACT area.

- The weekly Multicultural Voice Radio program is presented by CMCF Committee member Dr Mandy Scott, supported by Mr Seevali Panagoda and Mrs Chin Wong, as required.
- We thank all three presenters for their dedication in hosting this program and we do encourage our community members who are interested in radio broadcasting, to get involved and support this program. This radio program conducts regular interviews with prominent community sector leaders and often discusses topics of interest to the multicultural community.
- Members who would like to promote their activities or raise issues to discuss on the program are welcome to contact Dr Mandy Scott on Mandy@cmcf.org.au.
- The broadcasts may be heard at:

<https://www.2xxfm.org.au/Form/programdetail/?canberra-multicultural-voices>

Advance Care Planning Project

CMCF secured a grant in the previous financial year to raise awareness on **Advance Care Planning (ACP)** within ACT's multicultural communities in partnership with Canberra Health Services (CHS).

The Advance Care Planning project aims to increase the awareness and uptake of Advance Care Planning, to promote better understanding of the needs for Advance Care Planning that are sensitive and acceptable by the multicultural communities due to their religious, cultural and values.

Advance care planning involves planning for an adult's future health care. It enables an individual to make some decisions now about the health care they would or would not like to receive if they were to become seriously ill and unable to communicate their preferences or make treatment decisions.



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Led by CMCF Secretary Mrs Chin Wong, this project is implemented this year with conducting awareness sessions separately with multiple community organisations. Given the community interests generated, thanks to Mrs Wong’s tireless efforts, CMCF will continue to run more awareness sessions in 2025 for wider multicultural community coverage.

We are working with target community groups to promote the program and to encourage the community leaders to get involved.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

CMCF was successful in receiving grants from the ACT Government and other funding sources that allowed us to advance our advocacy and community support objectives. These funds supported our anti-racism campaign, health literacy initiatives, bi-language promotion activities, and community capacity-building efforts. However, it should be noted that there was no ACT Government support for basic operational costs during 2023-24.

The **Income and Expenditure Statement** for the financial years 2023-24 and 2022-23 provides a snapshot of CMCF’s financial performance:

Income and Expenditure Statement for 2023-24	2023-24	2022-23
Total Income	\$84,006	\$102,171
Total Expenditure	\$84,291	\$104,176
Deficit	\$(285)	\$(2,005)

CMCF Treasurer’s Report is presented separately analysing these financial figures.

CMCF’s prudent financial management ensured that resources were directed toward high-impact projects, including the community insurance program and multilingual educational events. By maintaining transparency and accountability, CMCF continues to demonstrate responsible stewardship of resources, fostering stakeholder trust and support.

CMCF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

In the coming months, CMCF will be enlisting our community groups to work on a few significant projects through some of the grants received:

- **Advance Care Planning project to continue** with the aim to increase the awareness and uptake of Advance Care Planning in ACT’s CALD Communities.
- **Anti-Racism campaign** with the aim to **establish a multicultural Anti Racism Action Group** to promote the Anti-Racism Stop with Me campaign.



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- **Senior Multicultural Community Leaders Network** with the aim of hosting senior community conversation groups and continuing to work with service providers to support our growing population.
 - Develop a **Disability Services Network** in collaboration with National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) to reflect our multicultural community's needs and promote a better understanding of Disability Services accessible to multicultural communities.
 - Develop a **Youth Network** in collaboration with its member organisations and local service providers to have a better understanding of the multicultural family needs and concerns.

OUR IMPACT: STRENGTHENING REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY

Community Public Liability Insurance

CMCF proudly continues its long-standing community public liability insurance policy, offering \$20,000,000 in coverage with an annual renewal option. This comprehensive scheme has grown to include coverage for contents, volunteers, and property, making it an invaluable resource for multicultural organisations. With over 65 organisations participating, members benefit from significantly reduced premium fees, providing financial relief while ensuring robust protection. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Ms **Carol Keil**, who has been instrumental in administering the scheme. Her dedication ensures smooth processing of new applications and renewals, demonstrating CMCF's commitment to serving the community efficiently.

Collaboration with Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia

CMCF, with the endorsement of the ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs, has reaffirmed its position as the **recognised peak multicultural body representing Canberra's multicultural communities** in a formal correspondence to the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA). We stand ready to collaborate with FECCA to ensure that ACT's diverse communities are strongly represented at the national level alongside other National Peak Advisory bodies.

Through this partnership, we aim to amplify the voices of multicultural communities, advocate for equitable policies, and enhance programs and services that reflect their unique needs.

Representation at the ACT Electoral Commission Advisory Council

CMCF ensures community concerns are reflected in electoral strategies to foster inclusive participation.

CMCF participated as an invited member in the **ACT Electoral Commission Advisory Council's (ACTEC)** consultation sessions and provided feedback to ensure actions developed are relevant to the needs of the community. CMCF Chair was approached by the ACTEC to provide a

community engagement strategy and accordingly, a discussion strategy paper was prepared on ***Engaging with ACT's Multicultural Communities***. This paper was shared with ACTEC as a part of this consultation process, which was appreciated and used by the Commission.

Advocating for Our Multicultural Communities

As the leading voice for multiculturalism in the ACT, CMCF is committed to addressing key issues impacting the community. Our advocacy and participation extend across a range of critical initiatives and forums:

- **Community Language Network:** CMCF attends the regular Language Network meetings in support of the Community Language Schools and provides inputs with the development of ACT Language policies. We acknowledge the valuable contributions and continuous work of the CMCF Committee members, Dr Mandy Scott, Mr Seevali Panagoda and Mr Ravi Krishnamurthy in promoting bi-lingual language education within ACT's CALD communities.
- **Elder Abuse Network:** CMCF actively participates in this network of service providers, program advocates, and policymakers to bring attention to elder abuse and share strategies to protect vulnerable older people in our communities.
- **ACT Regional Aged Care Network:** CMCF supports this Federal Government forum designed to improve outcomes for older Australians in the ACT. We encourage senior community groups to join these discussions and contribute their perspectives.
- **CHN Community Advisory Council:** As a multicultural representative, we provide actionable recommendations to ensure healthcare strategies are consumer-focused, culturally inclusive, and aligned with local healthcare needs and expectations.
- **Community Services Directorate Updates:** CMCF remains engaged in these meetings to ensure CALD communities can access critical health and home support services, contributing to the development of the Age-Friendly City Plan for future action.
- **ACT Mental Health Multicultural Reference Group:** CMCF contributes to initiatives aimed at addressing mental health challenges within multicultural communities, enhancing well-being through targeted strategies and engagement efforts.
- **ACT Palliative Care Community Forum:** CMCF provides culturally sensitive advice on resource development to meet the diverse needs of clients and their families.

Ongoing Engagement and Policy Feedback

CMCF regularly liaises with key stakeholders to represent multicultural perspectives in policymaking:

- **Migration and Skilled Intake:** Through collaboration with Multicultural Liaison Officers from the Department of Home Affairs, CMCF provides vital community feedback on migration policies and intakes.

- **Evoenergy ECRC (Energy Consumer Reference Council):** Representing multicultural communities, CMCF advises on energy policies to ensure strategies are culturally aware, cost-effective, and environmentally responsible.
- **Strong Partnership with ACT Policing**
CMCF acknowledges the unwavering support of **ACT Policing**, whose regular liaison and attendance at our Executive Committee meetings have been pivotal in addressing critical issues affecting multicultural groups. Their active engagement strengthens connections with communities in need and underscores the importance of collaborative efforts to create a safer, more inclusive Canberra.
- **ACT Ministerial Multicultural Advisory Council (ACTMAC)**
The establishment of the **ACT Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism (ACTMAC)** on September 1, 2023, marks a milestone for multicultural representation in Canberra. With 11 appointed members, including CMCF Secretary Mrs. Chin Wong, the Council directly advises the Minister for Multicultural Affairs on the aspirations and concerns of CALD communities.

CMCF's ongoing engagement with ACTMAC ensures that multicultural voices are heard and valued through robust consultations, reinforcing our mission to advocate for Canberra's vibrant and diverse communities.

Driving Inclusive Outcomes

CMCF's steadfast participation in these critical initiatives underscores our mission to advocate for an inclusive Canberra. Whether through mental health strategies, aged care policies, or national advocacy, we ensure that multicultural communities remain central to decision-making processes. By working collaboratively with local and national bodies, CMCF continues to champion meaningful change and create a brighter future for all.

CMCF OUTLOOK: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT/PARTICIPATION EVENTS

CMCF supports our member organisations in their efforts to organise information sessions/workshops and celebrative events and provide guidance and assist new and emerging communities to apply for grants and funding.

CMCF will continue to seek funding in support of ACT's community organisations and plan to work in partnership with identified community groups and service providers to deliver information and training sessions focusing on community capacity building, health promotion, health literacy and legal Aid services.



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Australian Red Cross and CMCF Partnership

Australian Red Cross Lifeblood is committed to providing biological products to improve the health outcomes for all Australia's patients. Led by Vice Chair Mr Arif Haque, CMCF will support Australian Red Cross Lifeblood to educate and raise awareness about the need for blood products in ACT's diverse multicultural communities that will have a significant and invaluable impact on Australia's patients.

Australia's expanding multicultural population has increased the need for rare blood groups that are only found in donors with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Clinical evidence suggests that patients requiring multiple transfusions of red cells, plasma, platelets and stem cells have a better health outcome when their donors match their ethnic background.

To be specific, blood types are significantly complicated than people think, consisting of more than 300 other variants within the commonly recognised blood groups A, B and O; and for patients with rare blood types, an exact match is vital for their recovery.

Lifeblood's current focus is to increase the Australian Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities in Australia's donor panel to reflect the multicultural diversity of Australia's patients.

CMCF Partnerships on Bi-Languages Program

CMCF will continue working with the **ACT Bilingual Education Alliance (ACTBEA)** and **Mother Tongue – Multilingual Poetry** to promote and raise awareness of the value of multilingual skills in the Canberra community. We thank Mandy Scott for liaising with these groups.

- With Mother Tongue – Multilingual Poetry, CMCF auspiced performances by 4 local poets at the 2024 NMF Languages Showcase, which is coordinated each year by the ACT Community Language Schools Association. We also helped promote three multilingual poetry open mic events held at Smiths Alternative in the City in April, July and October.

CMCF is also one of the stakeholders represented on the Canberra Languages Network. Chaired by the ACT Education Directorate, the network provides the opportunity for discussion about the current state of language learning across school-based programs, home language learning and external formal and informal language programs.

Voices of Diversity: Multilingual Connections in Canberra

In 2025, the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum (CMCF) will launch *Voices of Diversity*, an innovative multilingual project dedicated to preserving languages and fostering cross-cultural bonds. This project will be led by CMCF Committee member Mr Ravi Krishnamurthy, supported by Mr Seevali Panagoda. This initiative will empower multicultural communities by celebrating linguistic diversity and providing inclusive opportunities for language learning and cultural exchange.



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Key activities of the project include:

- **Community Language Hubs:** Hosting free workshops and events to teach and promote heritage languages.
- **Cultural Storytelling Sessions:** Sharing traditional tales in multiple languages to connect generations.
- **Multilingual Digital Library:** Developing a community-curated collection of accessible language resources.
- **Language Ambassadors Program:** Training community leaders to advocate for language preservation and education.

This project will build bridges between cultures, foster deeper connections across Canberra's diverse communities, and provide a platform for every voice to be celebrated and heard. It underscores CMCF's commitment to ensuring the region's linguistic heritage thrives for future generations.

Community Engagement With Stakeholders And Our Community

Throughout the year, CMCF representatives continue to build strong cohesive and productive working relationships by attending various consultations / co-design / workshops to ensure that multicultural communities' needs are addressed. Some of the consultative workshops attended by CMCF representatives included representation and contributions to:

- ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) peak community forums and other consultative forums
- Canberra Primary Health Network Community Engagement Advisory Council
- Council of Ageing (COTA) attending Elderly Abuse Network meetings
- RASH committee as a community representative organisation, supporting new and emerging communities to set up their own support organisations
- Service Australia Multicultural Advisory Forum Southwest NSW ACT
- Settlement Council of Australia Network and free Webinar meetings
- Elderly Abuse Network
- Multicultural Representative on 2XX Board of management
- CMCF ACT Representative to National Ethnic Disability Alliance
- Education Network committee to provide input to Language and Education Policies
- Health Care Consumers Association Older People Network



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BUILDING A STRONGER MULTICULTURAL FUTURE

As the landscape of challenges and opportunities for multicultural communities evolves, so too must our commitment to promoting social inclusion and addressing emerging issues with agility and resolve.

At CMCF, we are not only prepared but determined to meet these demands head-on. I firmly believe that with the unwavering dedication of our Executive Committee members and the strength of our collective vision, we will continue to grow and amplify our impact. Together, we will drive meaningful initiatives, advocate tirelessly for our communities, and take decisive action to ensure Canberra remains a shining example of a global Multicultural City—a place where diversity is celebrated, inclusion is championed, and our multicultural voice is heard.

I present this Annual report to you.

Signed

M. Hari

Dr Madhumita IYENGAR

Chair
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