

African Australians: A report on human rights and social inclusion issues

Background

In the past, Australia's immigration has seen relatively homogenous influxes, mainly from broadly culturally-familiar backgrounds. More recent years have seen new and emerging communities arriving and settling into Australia, many of which have pressing human rights needs. These needs present unique challenges for service providers and policy-makers.

African communities are new and emerging communities. Australia needs to respond appropriately and sensitively to new and emerging communities. It must also develop its skills in settlement service provision, integration programs and cross-cultural communications.

There has been no national report published that inquires into the issues for African Australian communities that is framed within a human rights perspective.

Many of the needs of African Australian communities can be seen as pressing human rights: the need to protect the rights of humanitarian entrants, of children, women, people with a disability or physical or mental illness (or co-morbidity), the need for employment, adequate housing, education, to live lives free from discrimination or violence, to freedom of cultural expression, freedom of religion and belief, and to develop a new, hybrid African Australian identity.

In 2007, the 'integration potential' of African Australian communities came under the media spotlight. As well as examining the issues for African Australians, this project aims to debunk some of the myths that have been voiced so readily in the media and in recent public debate.

Project

This project will be undertaken as a partnership between the Commission, Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) in Victoria; Australian Red Cross; the Diversity Health Institute; and the Australian Government Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

The project will:

- consult closely with African Australian communities, African Australian community leaders, academic experts, non-government organisations, front-line service providers and other key informants - to build the evidence and to fully explore issues that communities face
- include a special focus on issues faced by groups that may experience greater vulnerabilities: young people, African Muslim communities and African Muslim women. We will also explore the impacts of gender throughout the project
- present the information in a final report which will identify human rights, social inclusion and discrimination issues faced by African Australian communities as well as include four research papers
- suggest solutions to issues raised and make recommendations to stakeholders to inform future policy, program and service design as well as public debate and education – solutions and recommendations will be included in the final report
- produce a plain language guide (an overview of the final report)

It is anticipated that the final report will be fed back to the community in late 2009.

Objectives

The objectives of the project include the following:

- raise awareness and increase understanding of human rights and responsibilities and complaints process in the broader community, African Australian communities and young people within them
- ensure African Australian communities and stakeholder inclusion and engagement in the project
- develop a more thorough and strategic understanding of the range of issues faced by African Australian communities
- contribute to better planning for all tiers of government to respond to the needs of African Australian communities, as well as ways to support more welcoming and respectful social environments
- provide a solid research base for tertiary institutions, non-government or service delivery agencies to build on for further research, consultations or policy and program planning in the future
- contribute to better capacity, communications and understanding between and within African Australian communities
- ensure a better knowledge base which will support the media thus encouraging more balanced reporting about African Australians and related issues

Partners

Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES) in Victoria

AMES provides an extensive range of adult education, training and employment programs to a diverse client community at state, national and international levels. In 2006, AMES worked with almost 50,000 people from 138 countries.

Australian Red Cross

Whether its immigration and community detention visits, emergency settlement support or the asylum seeker assistance scheme, Red Cross helps people in need, no matter who you are, no matter where you live.

Diversity Health Institute (DHI)

The DHI is a consortium of public health organisations that work together to improve the health and well-being of Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community. The DHI is based in the Sydney West Area Health Service (SWAHS), however it comprises of units with a state-wide, national and international focus and is funded from a variety of sources including NSW Health and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.

Australian Government Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)

FaHCSIA is the Australian Government's principal source of advice on social policy and is responsible for about a quarter of the government's budgetary outlays.

FaHCSIA works in partnership with other government and non-government organisations in the management of a diverse range of programs and services designed to support and improve the lives of Australians.