



## Statement from ECCV Chair

### **Multiculturalism makes us stronger: Pondering the role of media in post-COVID Australia**

Despite the enormous challenges thrown our way by the pandemic, our sense of community has been a major protective factor against the threat of COVID-19. The value we place on social cohesion in Victoria has been a critical element in mobilising us to mitigate the spread of coronavirus and support those most in need.

Many of us from multicultural communities and organisations have been involved in actions that have provided assistance, interventions and critical information for our communities. Whether it has been addressing gaps in service provision, communicating the latest official health updates or helping those in urgent need of material aid, we have all played a role in keeping our community safe, informed and empowered during this time. It is a pity that these actions and contributions are not highlighted and discussed by sections of Australia's mainstream media.

This response has occurred not because we are a weak and divided society as some seek to portray, but because we have a strong sense of community and belonging. This is a sense of community that has evolved with the changing face of modern Australia. Multiculturalism – the coming together of diverse peoples – gives us the values, strength and resources to be able to do this.

It is expected that the next Population Census in 2021 will show that more than one third of all Victorians have been born overseas with more than three quarters migrants coming from a country where English is not the first language. Similarly, the Census will show that most Victorians will have at least one parent who was born in one of more than 200 plus countries and who speak one of more than 250 languages other than English.

From ancient Indigenous cultures that have sustained this land to the diverse cultures that now call Australia home, multiculturalism is today very much Australia and Australian culture. Describing our diversity as toxic and the cause for the spread of COVID-19, or questioning the national loyalties of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds or seeking to legislate assimilationist principles as a foundation for migration, does not represent the Australia we are today or the contribution that millions of migrants from across the world who've helped create one of the strongest democracies in the world.

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria is proud of the role it has played and continues to play with its members, the Victorian Multicultural Commission and the Victorian Government in taking up and responding to the challenges thrown our way by the pandemic. It has been inspiring how multicultural communities have responded to each challenge in 2020.

Earlier this year, Minister Alan Tudge and MP Jason Wood were right to acknowledge the immense contributions made by diverse communities across the country in response to the unprecedented bushfires. Whether it be fundraising to support those in need, such as the \$1m raised by Victoria's Afghan community for bushfire recovery, or the delivery of food and protective equipment by ethnic associations and faith groups during the lockdown period, or the innovative development and sharing of in-language information with groups that are hard to reach, multicultural communities have gone to enormous lengths, often putting themselves at risk, to make sure that people are kept safe and connected during this unprecedented year.

COVID-19 poses a continuing challenge and we owe it to all Australians to put our energy into supporting this work, not into making baseless claims and laying blame where it is not warranted.

Numerous examples of working together have fundamentally demonstrated not only how resilient and strong our multicultural society is in Victoria, but how strong Australian democracy is. When you see how the pandemic is fracturing societies in other parts of the world where divisions are stoked and reinforced, our collective response to the pandemic leaves me feeling proud to be Victorian and Australian.