

Future Directions

The underlying framework for future directions in the development of multicultural policy in New South Wales was laid down in 2000 by the establishment of the four Principles of Multiculturalism in legislation.

This legislation also incorporated the requirement for the chief executive officer of each public authority to implement the Principles of Multiculturalism within the area of his or her administration.

The Principles of Multiculturalism should, therefore, become an integral part of agencies' corporate plans, and inform and be addressed in the development and implementation of the cyclical business plans of each agency.

The Plan of Action proposed in the Green Paper and developed below is intended essentially as a directions statement to guide and inform agencies in the development of their own shorter-term strategic plans, specific to their areas of administration, for the continuing improvement of services and outcomes for our multicultural society.

The Plan of Action 2012 will thus allow the flexibility needed to give guidance for action over a ten-year time-frame, in a period of rapid social and economic change and ever-increasing global influences.

Key Objectives

The Community Relations Plan of Action 2012 will be based on four Key Objectives, which flow from the Principles of Multiculturalism and articulate the Government's aims and the results expected from NSW Government agencies.

These four key objectives are:

- leadership
- community harmony
- access and equity within a framework of social justice obligations
- economic and cultural opportunities.

The Plan of Action 2012 will tie all proposed activities to one or more of the above key objectives.

As with the previous Action Plan 2000, the Plan of Action 2012 represents a “whole-of-government” approach focussing on performance across all public authorities.

The definition of public authority has been extended under the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000* to include:

“any public or local authority constituted by or under an Act and includes a Government department, a statutory State-owned corporation, a local council, a body whose accounts are required to be audited by the Auditor General or any other body prescribed by the regulations”.

While the Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW has key responsibilities under the Act, individual agencies will be required to deliver results in activity areas within their portfolio responsibilities.

Agencies will be expected to develop specific objectives and actions in their business plans and EAPS programs, with measurable outcomes, in order to address the Principles of Multiculturalism and the four key objectives.

While EAPS is the cornerstone of performance in the NSW public sector, the Community Relations Plan of Action 2012 is not limited to the EAPS process.

The whole-of-government approach to service provision to our culturally diverse society requires broad consultative mechanisms and a high degree of networking. This will be assisted and facilitated by the Community Relations Commission.

A review of agencies’ progress against the principles of multiculturalism and the Key Objectives of this White Paper will be carried out in 2008 and released in the same year.

Key Objective 1: Leadership

Leadership is fundamental in valuing and encouraging a culturally diverse society by being supportive of policy, legal and planning frameworks.

The NSW Government will use its authority to influence, endorse and support the promotion of the equal rights and responsibilities of all the people of New South Wales within a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society.

The Government will ensure that recognition of cultural diversity is an essential part of planning, developing and implementing policies and programs, making this a mandated responsibility of the chief executive officer of each public authority.

Multiculturalism has moved on from and reshaped the older notion of “ethnic affairs” in favour of a broader, more inclusive concept of community relations. It now applies equally to all citizens, whether members of the dominant cultural group or not. Multiculturalism is not a passive policy, nor is it a policy which favours one section of the community over another. Rather it is a policy which requires action to deliver inherent benefits to the community.

Leadership is a key ingredient in the success of multiculturalism. There must be tangible support from leaders of the political, governmental, community and commercial sectors if a cohesive society where diversity is valued, regarded as an asset, and effectively used is to be a reality.

Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW

The Community Relations Commission For a multicultural NSW, and particularly its Commissioners, also has a significant leadership role to play.

The Commission will continue to have a high public profile. As a centre for excellence in the field of multiculturalism, it will continue to enter into public debate and will provide advice and commentary on a range of contemporary community issues.

The level of autonomy held by the Commission, which enables it to speak on its own behalf, is strongly supported by the community, and this flexibility will be retained. The Commission will continue to be proactive in addressing issues as they arise and use public forums and the media to make reasoned comment within its field of expertise.

The Commission will also continue to provide leadership in bringing together community representatives and agencies to talk through issues as they arise, in order to achieve consensus and generate better understanding of diverse views.

Public Authorities – Chief Executive Officers

As noted above, the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000* makes it incumbent upon the chief executive officer of each public authority to implement the Principles of Multiculturalism within the area of his or her responsibility.

It is expected that this will be achieved in each case through the development and implementation of corporate and business plans, incorporating the agency EAPS program, appropriate to the agency's responsibilities.

Leaders of community organisations

When referring to leadership in a community relations context, it is impossible to overlook the role of the media and its influence on public opinion.

Leaders of community organisations representing culturally diverse interests need to have a public persona in order to put their side of the story via the media, particularly the mainstream media.

To assist community leaders in their role as spokespersons, the Community Relations Commission will facilitate development of a training package on media awareness for delivery to community leaders as required. This package will assist community leaders to present themselves in the media as credible spokespersons and equip them to deliver a clear message to a wide media audience.

The training for community leaders and potential leaders should also incorporate training in community development, strategies to promote community harmony, and civics and citizenship.

The Community Relations Commission will continue to promote the opportunity for persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including specific population groups such as young people and women, to serve on government boards and committees, and will report on levels of participation in the annual Community Relations Report.

Youth

While two Commissioners on the Community Relations Commission will be designated as representatives of youth from culturally diverse communities in New South Wales, agencies should also, where appropriate, build into programs opportunities for consultation with, and recognition of the achievements and potential of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.



Key Objective 2: Community harmony

The Government will foster a climate of mutual respect within a cohesive and harmonious multicultural society where people of all backgrounds recognise the importance of shared values and have a unifying commitment to Australia, its interests and future.

The challenge of establishing and maintaining a robust foundation of positive community relations, based on a commitment to Australia through the values of citizenship, will be addressed in the first instance by a strategy of providing open lines of communication and dialogue.

Oversight of the establishment of such networks will be the responsibility of the Community Relations Commission, which will also coordinate the capture and dissemination of factual material pertaining to our community of communities.

However, it is also incumbent upon all public authorities to ensure that information on community issues is timely and accurate, and that the myths, stereotypes and misinformation that can generate community tensions are avoided within their areas of administration.

A vital element in the promotion of community harmony and the meeting of social justice obligations is local government, which is delivering an increasing range of services to the people of NSW.

It is important that these services are appropriate to the culturally diverse community to which they are directed.

The Department of Local Government is responsible for ensuring that councils and shires have effective service delivery strategies which take cultural diversity into account. Currently, the main vehicle for action is the development of a social/community plan by each council and shire every five years.

The role of the Community Relations Commission has been expanded by the incorporation of local councils in the definition of **public authority** in the *Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000*, and in its legislated task of assisting and assessing public authorities in observing the principles of multiculturalism.

The Commission will work with the Department of Local Government and with local councils and shires, in developing strategies and mechanisms to meet the requirements of the Act. This will include participation in a review of the Social/Community Planning and Reporting Guidelines and in the development of monitoring and assessment procedures.

The education system, and the school sector in particular, has a pivotal role in influencing the attitudes of members of the younger generation. Programs which reinforce the civic values underpinning citizenship and the benefits and nature of our multicultural society have the capacity to establish a solid basis for community harmony.

In order to promote a greater understanding of our shared values and civic responsibilities, revisions to the K-10 syllabuses will ensure that Civics and Citizenship and Multiculturalism are incorporated across the curriculum.

As the lessons learnt extend beyond the schoolyard by students taking what they have learnt back into the home environment, the message of a curriculum promoting civic values can spread to other members of the family and beyond.

The relationship of parents with their children's schools, and their involvement in extra-curricular activities is vitally important, particularly for those parents from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Initiatives to assist parents of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to engage with the schools will continue to be developed, along with the translation of materials such as the *For Parents* module into appropriate community languages, as required.

In order to encourage all schools to take a proactive approach to the promotion of multiculturalism and citizenship, a new Ministerial Award in Education will be introduced for government and non-government schools, recognising efforts by schools in promoting a cohesive community.

The judging criteria for such an award will give recognition to the teaching of community relations subjects and the celebration of cultural diversity within the school environment. They will also identify and acknowledge the extent to which schools are involved in activities in the wider multicultural community. Strategies used successfully to involve parents from culturally diverse backgrounds in a wide range of school activities will also be taken into account.

The Ministerial Award will be presented annually at a high profile ceremony which will celebrate achievement and identify best practices which could be adopted across the whole school network.

To provide opportunities to share experiences and promote harmony, a program of cultural exchanges between NSW schools will be developed and expanded.

The Community Relations Commission will continue to collaborate with the Department of Education and Training in the ongoing comprehensive interagency campaign countering prejudice, racism and discrimination.

The Department of Education and Training is not the sole authority with responsibility for fostering citizenship, civic values and community harmony. All legislative authorities have a responsibility to extend community education on these issues within their sphere of administration.

It is expected that further initiatives in community education for a culturally diverse society will continue to be undertaken within their EAPS programs, especially by agencies responsible for justice, policing, sport and recreation, health and aged care provision. Such education programs may be delivered in a range of social settings including workplaces, adult and community education classes and schools.

Many immigrant and refugee families experience degrees of socio-economic disadvantage which prevent their participation in social and sporting activities. In order to address this issue and thus further promote community harmony, the Community Relations Commission will work with community organisations, youth groups and sporting bodies to encourage the widening of their membership, particularly where people from diverse cultural backgrounds are currently under-represented.

This initiative will complement the undertakings of the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, which works directly with sport and recreation organisations in New South Wales to facilitate the inclusion of under-represented and disadvantaged groups.

Wider participation would strengthen many social, service and sporting bodies, and also provide a better understanding of the value of cultural diversity in the community.

The NSW Government has established the Diversity Health Institute based in Western Sydney Area Health Service. The Institute is a statewide service which aims to promote optimal quality health care based on improved clinical diagnosis and assessment practices and to ensure that health services and programs are responsive to the social, cultural, linguistic and religious values and practices of the diverse NSW population.

The Institute consists of a number of existing services, including the Transcultural Mental Health Centre, the 24-hour Crisis Line, the Multicultural Problem Gambling Service, Multicultural Mental Health Australia, Women's Health at Work and the NSW Education Program on FGM.

Newly created services include the Service of Excellence at Auburn Hospital, the Global Health Institute and the Research and Education Centre, which is looking at the role of genetics in disease as well as ethno-pharmacology which looks at the differential responses to medication based on ethnicity.

The NSW Government will continue to develop appropriate responses to the needs of young people within the ethnic communities. Current models include Youth Partnerships with Arabic-speaking and Pacific Islander young people, a program for young people in the Illawarra, and the establishment of a world class soccer school – the Johnny Warren Soccer Academy.

An important strategy within the Youth Partnership with the Arabic Speaking Community is the development of Youth Liaison teams to make contact with young people in public or shared space areas.

It is expected that the evaluations and reports that flow from these initiatives will inform future youth programs and provide useful models for future actions.

The Community Relations Commission will continue its role of promoting and supporting whole of government access and equity partnerships.

The existing network of anti-discrimination bodies has served the community well, as the bodies are well-placed to deal with the complaints that they receive. There is also a range of legislated measures to respond to discrimination, vilification and harassment in place.

The NSW Government *Community Relations Crisis Management Plan* will complement the State Disaster Control Plan. The plan will include provision of a hotline to report incidents of harassment and violence in the community.

Migrant communities in the Bankstown/Canterbury, Warrawong/Berkeley, Mount Druitt and other areas will also share in funding from the NSW Government's *Community Solutions Crime Prevention Strategy*, which address social issues within local communities.

To ensure that police services meet the needs of all communities, the NSW Government will target police recruitment from diverse backgrounds and newly-arrived migrant groups to create a workforce that reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of New South Wales.

Future directions in government policy to deal with discrimination will focus increasingly on the identification of the root causes of racism and discriminatory behaviour, and the development of strategies and programs that will lead to the prevention of such behaviour.

The Community Relations Commission will also continue to promote initiatives to cultivate acceptance of religious diversity, by working with religious leaders and peak religious bodies, so that people are free to profess, practise and maintain their religious beliefs within a harmonious culturally diverse society.

The NSW Government will continue to ensure a coordinated, rapid response to any local community relations issues that may arise, particularly in the context of international tensions and occurrences.

The positive contribution to our society by ethnic communities and individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds deserves greater prominence and acknowledgement.

An annual Volunteering Award to recognise the contribution of individuals and organisations within migrant communities will be introduced. These awards will be coordinated by the Community Relations Commission.



Key Objective 3: Access and Equity

The NSW Government will ensure that all individuals have the greatest opportunity to make use of and participate in activities and services and that the community is consulted at all stages of policy and program development and delivery.

The EAPS program will continue to be the driver of access and equity strategies across the NSW public sector. However, feedback from community organisations and government agencies, and from consultations, indicates that the underlying principles behind EAPS need to be made better known.

To assist this process, a new definition of EAPS will be adopted, and the program will be discussed below in greater detail under its own heading.

As noted above, fundamental to sound development, implementation and evaluation of policies, resulting in better outcomes for end users of services, is the establishment of broad, effective consultation mechanisms.

Agencies reporting against the EAPS Standards Framework will ensure that consultative mechanisms:

- are structured to allow adequate coverage of the important issues
- provide a two-way flow of information so that input, which can help develop future deliverables and provide continuous improvement in the delivery of services, is captured
- result in formal responses to issues raised.

To assist agencies in developing broad consultation mechanisms, the revised editions of the *EAPS Resource Handbook* for agency CEOs and practitioners (see below) will include an expanded section on consultation, drawing on models of best practice.

Effective and appropriate provision of services to clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is based on good communication and an understanding of culturally-based expectations.

Most service delivery agencies have established sound cross-cultural training programs at the staff induction and client interface levels of their organisations. However, there is a need to address the cross-cultural dimension more thoroughly at senior levels of agencies.

Agencies will be expected to include cross-cultural service delivery issues in senior management seminars and corporate goal setting exercises.

To assist agencies in on-going training provision in this area, the Community Relations Commission will develop cross-cultural training modules to address cultural diversity issues that confront frontline service providers.

People with a disability, ageing people, young people and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds not only face the common disadvantages experienced by their peers in the general population, but far more complex levels of need that may arise from language and communication disadvantages and disadvantages that may arise from diverse culturally-based attitudes to their situation or status.

The particular needs of the multiply-disadvantaged need to be addressed by appropriate, well-researched programs within EAPS plans across the public sector, not just by the agencies that have particular responsibility for providing services for them.

Considerable concern was expressed during the consultation process by the community and by welfare organisations in particular, over Commonwealth government policy towards refugees, and the conditions faced by Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) holders. This concern focussed on the long term impact of detention, and on the costs to the non-government sector associated with TPV holders living in the community and not being able to access the full range of Commonwealth-funded services.

The Community Relations Commission will continue to monitor the impact that the Commonwealth's policy on TPV holders has on community relations in New South Wales, and will use appropriate mechanisms, such as the Ministerial Council on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, to highlight these issues to the Commonwealth.



Key Objective 4: Economic and Cultural Opportunities

The NSW Government will promote the richness of cultural diversity within our multicultural society and utilise the cultural and linguistic assets of the population to maximise the development of New South Wales.

In today's global economy, it is in the interests of government, business and industry leaders, education and training institutions and others to recognise, value and employ the multicultural and multi-lingual knowledge, skills, experience and other assets of the people of New South Wales.

The diversity of the NSW workforce, and the depth and range of its language skill, will continue to be promoted by the NSW Government to generate investment and jobs. The fact that New South Wales has people who understand other cultures and can represent Australia not only in Europe and North America, but also in Asia, the Middle East and South America is a major economic asset which will continue to be highlighted when encouraging companies and multinational corporations to establish themselves, or their regional headquarters, in New South Wales.

The Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games provided a unique opportunity to showcase the rich culture of Australia and the economic opportunities that exist in New South Wales through its highly skilled, linguistically and culturally diverse workforce.

The Games period also provided valuable lessons and success stories in economic and business activity and in the celebration of culture that can be regarded as benchmarks for future economic and cultural activities.

The Department of State and Regional Development manages a broad range of initiatives to use the diversity assets of New South Wales to attract new investment and promote trade.

Networking opportunities to assist the Asian business community establish and reinforce relationships with government and other businesses will be fostered.

The NSW Government will continue to operate a network of specialist export advisers to develop, maintain and expand export markets, and will enlist bilateral peak bodies and chambers of commerce to promote international trade and participation in the Government's program of trade missions and market visits.

The promotion of Australia's vibrant cultural diversity within mainstream arts will continue, and the visual arts in particular will be strengthened by the establishment of a permanent exhibition space, the Australian Communities Gallery, at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.

The Migration Heritage Centre will continue to undertake activities which identify, document and promote the migration experience so that the origins of the rich diversity that now benefits Australia can be widely appreciated by all sections of the community. Located as an independent unit within the Powerhouse Museum, the Centre will continue to lead and support projects and provide a voice in public discussion about the role and value of cultural diversity in the community.

The Centre will continue to work with a broad range of stakeholders including all state cultural institutions, community organisations and local government, as well as the education and business sectors.

The National Multicultural Marketing Awards have been a feature of the NSW multicultural calendar since 1990. The Awards have been an outstanding success and now attract entries from all over Australia, not just New South Wales.

Since the introduction of the Multicultural Marketing Awards, a range of other awards have been introduced which recognise the linguistic and cultural assets of the people of New South Wales. These include literary awards (for prose, poetry and drama); awards for excellence in translation; awards for films dealing with inter-cultural immigration and settlement issues; and awards for volunteers. A wide range of awards recognising cultural diversity are presented through the schools system, and there is also recognition of services to our culturally diverse community built into the Premier's Public Sector and Premier's Seniors Awards.

To ensure that the appeal and success of the Awards is maintained through the next decade, the Community Relations Commission will bring together an appropriate review team to look at the objectives and judging criteria for the awards, and to develop and evaluate options to progress this valuable program.

Tourism

The rapidly changing and volatile nature of the tourism market requires an increasing emphasis on innovative and niche marketing, in which the cultural diversity of New South Wales is a rich and underdeveloped resource.

In the area of domestic tourism, the NSW Government will build on Tourism NSW's successful multicultural campaigns, through its *Towards 2020 Masterplan*, to encourage people of migrant backgrounds to holiday in New South Wales.

The government will also designate representatives the Community Relations Commission to the *Tourism Industry Forum*, to participate and provide advice.

Employment and skills recognition

Employment is not only an important determinant of successful settlement for migrants and refugees, it is also an important element in the economic health of the state.

As well as providing income, employment improves self-esteem and gives a sense of purpose and of commitment to the community.

Access to employment and skills development opportunities for people with a disability and mature aged workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is also crucial to maximise their opportunities for community participation.

Conversely, long term unemployment is not only a drain on welfare services, but has long-term ramifications in the health and mental well-being of the unemployed person that may have significant impact upon demand for health provision in the future.

Unemployment rates change within cyclical economic fluctuations and realignment of industry sectors, which makes it essential that government training programs at both the Commonwealth and state levels be carefully tuned to ensure that people from culturally diverse backgrounds seeking work have ready access to appropriate services.

Despite the current emphasis on encouraging skilled migration to Australia, many skilled migrants arriving in Australia are unable to access employment quickly, and need to be adequately trained in local work culture and to gain local experience.

While many migrants have their employment qualifications assessed as part of the visa process, this does not necessarily occur in the case of refugees, family dependents and some family reunion category migrants.

Migrants need to have their qualifications assessed as expeditiously as possible, not only for reasons of social justice, but also so that the New South Wales economy and community can gain from the skills and abilities that they have to offer.

The Office of Employment Equity and Diversity, within the Premier's Department, and the Community Relations Commission will use interdepartmental networks to reinforce the Government's commitment to increase employment opportunities for people whose first language is not English.



EAPS

EAPS was originally an acronym for Ethnic Affairs Policy Statement (later the Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statement program), but after over twenty-five years of use, the words behind the acronym have lost their meaning somewhat. EAPS has now become widely recognised as a term within its own right, and the use of the term will be retained.

Since its introduction some twenty-five years ago, the EAPS program has evolved into an effective management tool which fully integrates the needs of clients from culturally diverse backgrounds into the core business of agencies.

However, the consultation processes leading to the development of this White Paper indicates that there are still differing understandings in the mind of the community. The concept of EAPS and what it actually represents is open to differing interpretations across a wide audience, with some seeing the program simply as being the provision of language services, while others may view it merely in terms of equal employment opportunities for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

In view of this, EAPS has been redefined as follows:

“EAPS is a measure of agency performance where the needs of culturally diverse clients are fully integrated into core business, which in turn results in quality service delivery within the framework of the Principles of Multiculturalism and social justice obligations.”

The words in the definition are important:

- *measure of agency performance* – EAPS is not an obscure bureaucratic, theoretical model. EAPS is about performance and service delivery. It is results-oriented and capable of measurement and assessment.
- *fully integrated into core business* – Service delivery which is appropriate to a culturally diverse client group needs to be part of core business, not an optional add on. EAPS principles should be ingrained into the corporate culture of agencies.
- *quality service delivery* – There is no justification for any client receiving less than the optimal quality service because of a culturally diverse background. EAPS will require delivery standards to be established, monitored and reported on.
- *Principles of Multiculturalism* – The Principles represent a powerful legal declaration which underpins access and participation.
- *Social justice* – Gives effect to the Government’s overarching commitment to a fair society based on the equal worth of all its members.

An important resource for agencies in the development of their EAPS plans has been the *Resource Handbook for Chief Executive Officers and Senior Managers* which was published by the former Ethnic Affairs Commission.

The Community Relations Commission will produce a revised edition of the Resource Handbook, which will address issues raised in the evaluation of the Action Plan 2000, and place greater emphasis on improved services and outcomes under the EAPS program.

A companion publication will also be produced for EAPS practitioners in agencies. This will provide more detailed information on the requirements and management of EAPS, including the EAPS Standards Framework.

The development, implementation and reporting process will be informed and assisted by the release of an updated Premier's Memorandum on EAPS.

Every public authority, as defined in the Community Relations Commission and Principles of Multiculturalism Act 2000, will be required to make its EAPS Forward Plan information available to the public by including the document on its website.

As indicated above, however, an alternative process will be developed to assist local councils address the legislative requirements on them in implementing the principles of multiculturalism.

To assist agencies, the Community Relations Commission will facilitate the establishment of an EAPS practitioners network. To aid agencies in increasing awareness of EAPS, the Commission will also continue to provide information and organise workshops as required.

The Standards Framework

The evaluation of the Action Plan 2000 found that the EAPS Standards Framework has made a significant contribution to the success of the EAPS program.

Responses and submissions received during the consultations, however, indicate that there exists some misunderstanding about the Standards Framework.

The Standards Framework was not and is not intended as an accreditation mechanism. It was established as a tool to assist agencies in the development of cohesive EAPS strategies and for long term planning, by setting benchmarks against which agencies could self-assess their progress in the delivery of services to the community in a consistent format across the public sector.

Certain agencies are selected by the Premier because of their important work in providing essential services to the NSW community, or because they have an important role to play in delivering the NSW Government's key programs.

These agencies, called Key Agencies, are required to self-assess their EAPS programs against the Standards Framework, and to report on their programs annually. These reports contain considerable detail on progress made in their EAPS programs in the previous year, and a statement of plans for the year following.

The number of Key Agencies, and the agencies selected as Key Agencies, is at the discretion of the Premier.

Currently, the number of Key Agencies is about twenty, which is appropriate to the level of resources available and the priorities of the Community Relations Commission.

The possibility of engaging other agencies in the Standards Framework reporting process, or in a simplified version of it, was canvassed by the review of the Action Plan 2000.

The Community Relations Commission will conduct a review of the EAPS Standards Framework, taking into account the recommendations arising from the review and comments received during the consultation process.



Regional and Rural Programs

The NSW Government is committed to making regional New South Wales a better place to live, work and do business.

Although people of culturally diverse backgrounds are fewer in number and ethnic community organisations are less prevalent in regional and rural areas, it is important to recognise that they are entitled to the same level of service delivery and program activity that is available to their counterparts in the cities.

In the development of their programs, public sector agencies should bear in mind that, in addition to cultural and linguistic barriers to access and participation, people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds residing in regional and rural areas also face the common barriers of distance, time, limited public transport and cost of travel and communication.

As was pointed out in the consultations, there is often a strong gender bias in the distribution of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds across rural New South Wales. In some regional and rural areas, there are groups of predominantly male representatives of a particular ethnic group. The most socially isolated across rural NSW, however, are predominantly women, from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds.

In order to identify where more needs to be done, the Community Relations Commission has established Regional Advisory Councils (RACs), comprising individual appointees and heads of some service delivery agencies, in particular locations. The RACs will also assist in information dissemination, networking and addressing local issues.

To ensure that agencies give appropriate attention to the needs of regional and rural based clients with culturally diverse backgrounds, the issue of service delivery based on sound data collection needs to be reinforced in EAPS programs generally, and particularly in the EAPS responsibilities of key agencies.

The Community Relations Commission will work closely with the Premier's Regional Coordination Program to ensure that there is a whole-of-government approach to appropriate service delivery for regional and rural areas, and will liaise closely with the Regional Communities Consultative Council to help identify where improvements can be made.

Under-representation of diversity in rural and regional New South Wales means that many ethnic groups do not have the same opportunity to demonstrate their cultural heritage in a multicultural setting. As a result, these groups sometimes feel excluded from full participation in local community life, yet they feel proud of their rich heritage and would appreciate the opportunity to display their culture in terms of dance, art, food and so forth. Sometimes the lack of resources prevents full participation.

The Community Relations Commission, as part of its Community Development Grants Program, gives funding priority to "communities that are geographically isolated".

The small number of community organisations in regional New South Wales presents a difficulty for the Community Relations Commission to provide grants for significant projects with a regional focus.

It is recognised that, while keen to seek grant monies, local ethnic community groups often lack the experience and confidence to undertake significant projects.

The Community Relations Commission will use its combined networks to publicise the availability of grants, and to encourage groups to submit quality applications for funding.

The Commission will also undertake a review of its guidelines and other printed matter involved in its Community Development Grants Program with a view to providing greater assistance to smaller and isolated community groups in the preparation of grant applications.

In terms of its own services to clients, the Commission has been innovative in introducing videoconferencing to assist the provision of interpreter services in non-metropolitan court hearings. The Commission will continue to explore a whole range of options to utilise technology to overcome the problems of distance and isolation.

In this respect, the Community Relations Commission will look to establish agency arrangements within the Government Access Program (GAP), under which “shops” will be created in rural communities to improve access to services and information. The Commission will explore ways in which it can use this network to expand access points for its clients living outside the metropolitan areas of the state.

The Community Relations Commission will also enter into discussions with the State Library of NSW on ways in which the NSW Public Library Network can be further utilised as a vehicle for improving information dissemination, networking, and participation opportunities for people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Commission will also continue the expansion of its “Online Services Project” with the aim of developing interactive access to its services for people living in regional and rural NSW.

The Chairperson of the Commission and the Commissioners will continue to visit country areas to raise the profile of the Commission and generate awareness of the benefits of cultural diversity.

Language Services

Communication is fundamental to effective service delivery in a culturally diverse society.

The provision of quality language services is a necessary ingredient to ensure access, equity and participation in government programs. Without language services, sections of the community would be excluded from the benefits that flow on from the practical application of the Principles of Multiculturalism.

Although English is the common language of Australia, and the Commonwealth Government has structured the annual immigration program to place more emphasis on the English language skills of potential migrants, there will continue to be people in our society with a need for language services. Apart from the needs of people in the refugee and immediate family reunion migration categories, migrants will continue to be accepted from countries where the official language is other than English, and personal and other important “life documents” will need to be translated.

It is also important to note, given the ageing of our population, that migrants who settled here many years ago sometimes lose their English language ability with advancing years. They will require and be entitled to language services despite the fact that they have lived in Australia for long periods and may have previously been quite competent in English.

The need for effective and professional language services will therefore be ongoing. The importance of the provision of interpreting and translation services impacts on agency performance. This is reflected in the settings of the EAPS program.

The value of internationally recognised pictorial signs and symbols, particularly in public areas, also needs to be emphasised, and their use should be incorporated in agency communication strategies.

In the culturally diverse society of New South Wales:

- everyone is entitled to a qualified interpreter if they require such assistance in dealing with government agencies
- everyone should have access to professional translation services.

As a major provider of language services, most of which are on a fee-for-service basis, the Community Relations Commission will seek to find more cost-effective ways of delivering services.

The Commission also provides some language services on a non-recoupable basis, mostly for the courts and some other legal services. There are however, many other compelling circumstances, for example in the community welfare sector, where lack of resources makes it impossible for individuals or agencies to obtain the language service support needed, and the provision of free interpreter or translation assistance is justified.

The Commission will aggressively market its language services in the commercial sector and to potential clients interstate and internationally, and will employ emerging technology to do so.

The NSW Government will continue to fund the Commission to make access to its interpreter service available 24 hours a day, seven days per week for the cost of a local call.