



Draft Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Strategy

Submission

September 2015

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While this paper aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, it does not purport to reflect the exact views of individual councils.

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1 Introduction

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) is the peak representative and advocacy body for Victoria's 79 councils. The MAV was formed in 1879 and incorporated by the *Municipal Association Act 1907* with the purpose of promoting the efficient carrying out of municipal government through the State of Victoria and watching over and protecting the interests, rights and privileges of municipal corporations.

The MAV welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the *Draft Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Strategy* (the Strategy).

This submission is based on written and verbal feedback received from 20 councils and has not been endorsed by the MAV Board.

Overall Victorian councils response to the Strategy is positive and the MAV supports a state-wide approach to addressing the many varied issues that broadly fall under the banner of Social Cohesion and Community Resilience. The Strategy echoes the efforts many councils are making (or plan to make) towards building social cohesion and community resilience, some of which are outlined at the end of this document. The Strategy reflects community expectations, aligns with councils existing policies and approaches to health, wellbeing, diversity, inclusion, emergency management and place making, and speaks to councils' long-standing commitment to social justice.

The submission is structured to respond to the questions posed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Not all councils directly responded to the questions, so their feedback has been placed where most appropriate, or under general comments.

The MAV received a significant amount of feedback from councils both in the depth and length of their response. Whilst not all the comments are consistent we deemed it appropriate to provide an accurate reflection of the issues raised by the circulation of only a two page Strategy. Given the substantial amount of feedback and the significant amount of work still ahead to finalise and then implement this Strategy MAV recommends that the State Government develop a comprehensive process for directly consulting with local government on the Strategy's future development and implementation.

2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The State Government develop a comprehensive process for directly consulting with local government on the Strategy's future development and implementation.

Recommendation 2

A substantial proportion of the available funds should be allocated to initiatives that will be delivered by local government, in partnership with community members and local representatives from sectors in the Engagement Architecture.

Recommendation 3

Funds should be allocated to a state-wide activity that helps ensure that local government's use of allocated funds is guided by a consistent, evidence-based understanding of best practice in addressing social cohesion in Australia.

3 Does the Strategy speak to you? If not - how does it need to change?

Councils acknowledged that the Strategy is high level and clear, and not intended to describe specific actions. The MAV acknowledges the challenge of balancing clear and concise goals with the details and complexity of the issues the Strategy is attempting address, however the majority of councils indicated the Strategy was too brief, too broad and lacked detail, clarity and context. One council commented that without a clearly articulated action plan, it is difficult to determine the Strategy's scope, and that it lacks a clear sense of 'the issues' - the evidence, audience or outcomes.

It was important for councils that responses to violent extremism are informed. As one succinctly put it 'extremism is a symptom of holes in the social fabric of the community; not a source'. Another council suggested renaming the Strategy to 'Our Connected and Resilient Victoria'.

Councils appreciated that the Strategy:

- acknowledged that the issues are complex
- is taking an evidence-based approach
- is built upon on a community development framework
- is underpinned by social justice and equity
- intends to adopt of range of innovative and diverse approaches
- places an emphasis on evaluation
- includes a priority to build motivational narratives
- includes directions with a clear commitment to human rights and social justice
- has an integrated, cross-sector collaboration and cooperation approach
- includes representation across portfolios in the Taskforce

Councils suggested the Strategy could be improved by:

- ensuring narratives create opportunities for intercultural exchange to foster trust and harmonious relationships between groups

- incorporating a broader narrative outlining the context and rationale for what the strategy is and why it is being proposed
- an evaluation that documents attitudinal shifts among the mainstream community, and to trace changes over time
- renaming the strategy to a framework, if it is to remain high-level
- breaking down responses into manageable sections that can be supported by a variety of resources
- improving the layout to assist in a clearer message
- emphasising that *all* councils are encouraged and invited to participate, not just those areas seen as 'hot spots'
- that as well as implementing some new activities, the Strategy strengthen existing activities
- a focus on building on the strengths that are evident in communities
- alignment with existing policies and legislation, such as the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities
- more targeted research at a local community level to build evidence and better understand the social impact that the changing face of many suburbs and neighbourhoods have on social cohesion.
- the need for comprehensive engagement strategies to engage vulnerable and excluded people at risk of extremism *regardless of their background*

1.1. Focus on young people

The engagement of young people is crucial to achieving the social cohesion outcomes the Strategy aims for therefore the MAV supports the focus on empowering young people. One council suggested that a specific objective or principle for young people be developed to reflect this focus. There is clear evidence that fraught family relationships are key in the formation of feelings of alienation, loneliness and insecurity that may lead to unhealthy connections to extreme causes. At-risk young people need support to reduce their sense of alienation and frustration and exposure to alternative narratives that challenge and refute extremist ideologies. It is particularly important that consultation, ownership and leadership of the Strategy's implementation is shared with young people.

However, targeting young people alone is a narrow approach and the Strategy needs to be careful not to over-state the amount of young people involved in 'extremism'. It is unclear why and how the Strategy integrates the focus on young people with other groups. There is some concern that young people are positioned as consumers who will benefit from the Strategy, rather than key partners who may lead its development. There may be a more positive approach to identifying target groups that limits phrases such as 'especially youth', which may be seen as singling out. For example, the Strategy may benefit from the provision of an evidence-based explanation for why young people are a focus.

Councils recommended that a priority for the Strategy should be to address underlining issues that disaffect people overall. The focus on young people should be balanced with the responsibility of all stakeholders to create suitable environments for young people to participate and succeed.

For one regional council, while they do engage young people to ensure they feel included in society and are steered to a healthy path, they see this Strategy as specifically targeting young people at risk of extremism, which they don't believe is a current issue in their area. For them, disaffected young people are more likely to self-harm through drug and alcohol abuse.

1.2. Vision

Councils felt that the Vision is somewhat confronting, over-simplified and focuses on the problem. It may also be too broad; reference to 'inclusive' may imply that the Strategy seeks to address disability, gender or sexuality. The Strategy needs to be anchored to cultural diversity, rather than diversity in general.

The Vision's reference to supporting people to better respond to adversity raised questions on whether the CRU is reactive or proactive, and whether the Strategy will resonate with the broader community. Some suggested re-wording included:

- 'An equitable and inclusive Victoria which supports all people to thrive and develop resilience in responding to adversity'
- 'An inclusive Victoria which supports people to thrive in a complex and unpredictable way'
- 'A Victoria which is empowered and engaged, and where everyone belongs and shares values and respect for our cultural diversity'

1.3. Objectives

All objectives draw on factors which enhance, or compromise, social cohesion and resilience. In particular social justice and equity are aptly identified as important contributors. However, councils felt that the objectives could be clearer, more succinct, more measurable, and supported by community consultation to ensure there is whole-of-community commitment towards the vision.

Other suggestions were to:

- remove the word 'damage' from objective two as it is negative, or remove the line 'damage Victoria's social fabric' as it may also be redundant in the context.
- add '...through a strengths and asset based approach' to objective two
- change 'youth' to 'young people' in objective three, and throughout the Strategy

1.4. Principles

While supported overall, councils identified deficiencies in the detail of the principles, and commented that as it stands, they could lead to lack of understanding of what they signify.

Complexity

While it is understood that this section is an acknowledgement of the issues' complexity, the term itself is not seen as a principle. A recommendation is to rename the principle along the lines of 'Innovation' or 'Innovative Approaches'.

The mention of innovative approaches is especially appreciated. Some councils suggested strengthening this throughout the Strategy, as they are concerned that innovation can be easily lost, particularly given that ‘evidence-informed’ is also a principle.

Shared Responsibility

It is recommended that the addition of ‘community’ to to sector, institution and organisation in the principle would be beneficial. This may also be an appropriate space for government to articulate that they too, will build capacity in their organisations to develop, and create solutions to build social cohesion.

Co-Creation

It is recommended that this principle to include reference to partnerships, co-operation, collaboration, active and meaningful engagement, ‘all levels’ of government, and to add business / industry and education (as separate from academia). It is important that activities be multi-layered, multi-disciplinary and that they take a strength and asset based approach.

Meaningful and lasting community change always originates within and local residents understand best how to activate that change. Building and nurturing relationships is at the core of building healthy and inclusive communities. Citizens act responsibly when they care and support what they create.

To strengthen the value placed on innovation, one council suggested renaming this principle to ‘Innovation through Co-Creation’. They also recommended that the government take the ‘safe to fail experiment’ approach used to find innovative solutions to complex social systems.

Evidence-informed

There is a definitely a need for evaluation and ensuring activities achieve their desired outcomes. However, if the Strategy is to support innovation, there is potential for projects or approaches to fail to achieve their goals. It is suggested that the second point be reworded to reflect this, and to avoid fund recipients being locked into restrictive agreements. For example, ‘Evaluation will be inherent, ongoing and follow an action-based research model of reflective practice enabling a dynamic and responsive approach’. This may be consistent with the intention behind the mention of ‘providing flexibility for potentially unorthodox interventions’ under Governance.

A good suggestion was for this section to emphasise local, place-based initiatives (as they tend to be more evidence-based), along with initiatives that have transferable outcomes. Some councils also sought more clarity on what an evaluation framework may look like in practice.

Governance

Most councils questioned the term unorthodox, and there is concern around the term ‘interventions’. Perhaps this sentence could be replaced with ‘...flexibility for new and innovative approaches, and those of varying scale, scope and timeframe’. This would also provide consistency with terms used in the Complexity section.

Councils commented that ‘governance’ is not considered a principle, and suggested renaming this section to ‘Accountability’ or ‘Accountable Governance’. Reference to administrative and financial arrangements could also be included.

Suggested additional Principles:

- ‘Values’; that will articulate how the Strategy’s implementation will be guided.
- ‘Sustainability’; to reflect the government’s commitment and ensure that the Strategy is ongoing and long-term. Ideally, the Strategy would have bipartisan support and be sustained beyond government terms. As it builds trust, sustainability is also very important for any approaches that involve community members.
- ‘Place-based’; while this approach is mentioned, the need for activities to be local and community driven should be elevated. It is consistent with other principles and a recent ‘Dropping Off the Edge’¹ report, and provides a sound basis for the Strategy’s implementation. Prioritisation of local activities developed with communities, in response to local issues and identified by residents was key to councils’ feedback.

1.5. Indicators

Feedback is that the indicators are appropriate, relevant and align with those chosen by some councils in their own work to improve social cohesion. As they are also high-level and aspirational, councils suggested that they be expanded, and that more information be provided about how the indicators will be measured and importantly, whether they refer to the broader community and/or targeted groups.

Measuring the Strategy’s success is a substantial project in and of itself, and councils are interested in:

- how, operationally, indicators would be realised
- where the CRU will gather data from
- whether communities were engaged before the indicators were determined
- evidence for how these indicators were chosen as measures of social cohesion
- whether the indicators were developed in consideration of [Community Indicators Victoria](#)
- how the evaluation framework will allow for funded activities to move towards and measure these indicators, with the acknowledgement that they cannot be achieved within the life of any one project.

There is concern that the indicators may need to measure more than a theoretical understanding of the benefits of diversity, and focus more on how cultural diversity is valued by all community members in a variety of environments (such as workplaces, educational and commercial settings, and in social interactions). Specific feedback includes:

- the risk of identifying young people as something different to ‘people’, and appropriating blame
- add ‘inclusion’ to indicator three, as it is not enough for cultural diversity to exist and be valued, but for it to be included

¹ <http://www.dote.org.au/recommendations/>

- indicator four is particularly important, and should be the first indicator

Several councils commented that indicator two implies that being able to contribute is the same as actually contributing, and that it is enough for people to recognise their potential. The recommendation is that the Strategy emphasise the need to create opportunities for participation, and that this indicator be reworded along the lines of ‘people recognise their potential and strengths, and actively contribute to local initiatives and participate in civil society and the workforce’.

1.6. Strategic Priorities

These priorities are seen as ambitious and requiring more clarity in order to better communicate the Strategy’s intention and implication and understand the CRU’s capacity to measure and achieve them. Priority six is of interest, particularly what a motivational narrative would look like, who would provide it, to whom would it be targeted, and what would it motivate people to do.

Suggested additional priorities are:

- Model an assets-based approach to identify, promote, showcase, and share community and individual strengths that contribute to social cohesion and community resilience; and
- Create authentic partnerships with young people of all backgrounds.

1.7. Engagement Architecture

Of all Strategy elements, this principles section attracted the most suggestions. The Strategy needs to incorporate a whole of community, multi-sectoral approach, and consider the various elements and variables that impact on social cohesion and address these holistically. The government should engage with a range of issues and implement a range of initiatives across a broad spectrum of the community.

To truly comment on the Strategy’s ability to fulfil these recommendations, greater clarity is required around exactly who or what the Strategy means when it refers to ‘communities’ and ‘relevant communities’. No one community can solve a lack of social cohesion. Councils expressed interest in knowing what role which communities will have and why, and at what point they will be part of the Strategy’s implementation, if not development.

Some councils commented that the Engagement Architecture fails to include individuals. It may be that individuals are intended to be included under ‘communities’, but the concern from councils is that the CRU will rely on consulting people through services, groups or community leaders. There are many individuals with experiences and knowledge that could be beneficial to social cohesion, who may not be linked to services or groups. Further, there is capacity for people to contribute to or detract from social cohesion at an individual level.

Councils suggested that the Engagement Architecture should:

- add ‘and individuals’ to Communities
- clarify that ‘government’ refers to all three levels of government

- indicate the interrelationships between levels of government and between the stated sectors
- make reference to the impact of national and international settings, resources and policy
- include the media
- include schools and educational institutions explicitly, rather than under government or service providers
- add 'including sport and recreation and interfaith networks' to Community Groups
- add 'law enforcement and police', or elsewhere make reference to the impact that a lack of social cohesion has on community safety
- add 'including community health providers' to Service Providers
- consider adding relevant state departments such as the Department of Education and Training)
- outline how the government perceive sectors working together, if and how they intend to consult them and how'll they'll work together

Councils have strong local networks with all the stakeholders identified in the Engagement Architecture, so would like to be involved to ensure that the implementation of the Strategy is as effective and efficient as possible.

4 Would your organisation get behind it? If not - how does it need to change?

Councils are generally comfortable with the Strategy, endorse its aspirations, admire its ambition and support it in principle, especially if a community development approach is taken. However, their active support depends on what programs are rolled out, proposed actions, what partners are involved and their capacity to deliver any programs. Councils are keen for the Strategy to add value to existing work in this space, and for the CRU to have the agility to work closely with existing networks.

Councils expressed a need for a timeframe and clarification on how the Strategy will be resourced and how funding allocations will be determined. Most commented that their ability to get behind the Strategy depended on the level of appropriate funding and support made available to implement actions, and they requested information on how the \$25 million allocation will be administered.

Questions were raised regarding whether local government will:

- have an on-going and meaningful role to play in the Strategy's development and implementation and what that role would be
- to be an equal partner and how that would that translate in practice
- be represented on the Ministerial Taskforce
- be expected to contribute, and how
- be engaged early own so that the Strategy's implementation links with existing local actions, approaches and resources

- be funded to develop and implement actions relevant to specific communities and neighbourhoods

There is an ongoing need for strategic planning, coordination and partnerships among all levels of government, in supporting social cohesion and resilience. Accordingly, any initiatives stemming from this Strategy should embody an intergovernmental approach, even where a funding program approach is taken. This would help ensure that actions arising from the Strategy resonate with and address local community issues in specific suburbs and neighbourhoods.

Local government has a strong history of sound, evidence-based practice and its community development expertise and local level program development needs to be respected, engaged and made part of the Strategy's implementation. Successful current interventions need to be acknowledged, monitored and maintained. Comments were made that the Strategy should explicitly state the government's intention to gather data on current and recent projects around resilience, health and wellbeing and partnership, and to support future initiatives with these in mind.

Some councils felt unable to respond to this question due to a lack of information about what the Strategy is and how it will work, but expressed interest in collaborating with the state.

Due to its complexity and breadth, obtaining funds to address social cohesion is an ongoing challenge for local government. One council felt that while the \$25 million allocation is a good start, it is a very conservative amount and could be viewed as a token measure. Another reasonably commented that for change to be sustained it demands that commitment be adequately resourced.

Councils recommended that a substantial amount of the available funds should be allocated to initiatives to be delivered by local government in partnership with community members and local representatives of the sectors in the Engagement Architecture. A further recommendation is that funds should be allocated to a state-wide activity that helps ensure that local government's use of their allocated funds is guided by a consistent, evidence-based understanding of best practice in addressing social cohesion.

An ideal way to ensure this is to support an initiative whereby the recently launched online [Building Social Cohesion in Our Communities](#) resource is rolled out to all Victorian local governments through workshops. These could be based on a similar roll out of the resource in New South Wales, and correspond to existing complimentary projects such as training that promotes safe and constructive bystander action against racism, and the work being undertaken by the Scanlon Foundation. The resource was specifically developed for local government by the Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government, for the Australian Human Rights Commission.

5 Are you concerned about specific ideas or language used in the Strategy? If so, can you suggest specific changes?

Some councils were unconcerned with the language given the high-level of the Strategy, but assumed that a comprehensive communications strategy would include a plain English version of the Strategy aimed at community members. They suggested that this would ensure that the government's intentions and objectives are understood by all community members. The Strategy should be aimed at the whole community, not only public servants and academics, and be a source and a platform for continuous communication and engagement.

Many comments focused on using more positive language and taking (and advocating for) a strengths and asset based approach. In addition to presenting social cohesion as a way to prevent violent extremism, the Strategy should state the importance of social cohesion as a way to build community health, wellbeing and resilience.

Alternatively, one council felt that the use of strengths-based language may make the Strategy's focus unclear. The term community resilience is commonly used in emergency preparedness and management. However, the language used suggests that this Strategy focuses on preventing violent extremism. They question whether there is evidence that resilience-building strategies for preventing violent extremism are the same as those that prepare communities for natural disasters.

Another common comment was that the language is vague and needs to make more apparent what types of activities the CRU will support, coordinate and undertake. At the same time, the language suggests a capacity to deliver on extremely complex objectives.

Much of the language seems strong in rhetoric around empowering the individual. One council supported this, and encouraged initiatives that firmly identify government and/or business being active in this empowerment.

Most suggestions have been addressed in the relevant sections. Others include:

- better defining the term Government as it is unclear whether the Strategy refers to the State or Federal Government, or whether it also refers to local government
- avoiding confusion with the broader diversity and inclusion sector by explicitly referring to *cultural* diversity or inclusion (assuming this is the case). Otherwise, the Strategy's scope should be clearly stated to clarify that it does not also relate to accessibility and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex matters
- the term civil society may be more plainly expressed as community, unless something different is intended (which would require defining)
- in the Strategy's context, defining key terms such as social cohesion, resilience, adversity, radicalisation and violent extremism to increase understanding and avoid them being read as 'code' for other, perhaps unintended ideas. There is concern that the language may send mixed messages about the Strategy's intent

- not using the term violent extremism at all, and instead use terms such as disengagement. This would ensure the Strategy is conducive to participatory models and reduces, rather than adds to, people's sense of alienation
- not using the term interventions, as it is important that work is done with, rather than to, communities. Perhaps 'collaborations' would be more appropriate
- clarifying what level of intervention the Strategy intends to address, for example early intervention, response, prevention or something else.
- exercising caution in conflating radicalisation with extremism. Being exposed to different and even radical ideas is important for the growth of individuals and communities. It is only when ideas are suppressed, combined with a reduced investment in communities, that extremism takes hold
- reconsidering the term 'taskforce', as it sounds like a law enforcement approach. Perhaps adopt Working Group, Project Team or a more community development-friendly term
- defining who the Taskforce and CRU are

6 Is anything missing which you think needs to be included?

Most suggestions for items to be included have been addressed in relevant sections, or under General Comments below, however a few remaining ideas are that the Strategy:

- is presented as an opportunity to celebrate diversity
- builds on how we accept cultural diversity, rather than attempt to 'fit' it in a box that is not clearly defined
- links with existing legislation such as Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, which offers clear protection of civil and political rights. This should be included in the architecture, not simply as a background document but as central to conceptualising mutuality and relationships within a cohesive community
- links with existing, sector-wide initiatives such as the recently launched online social cohesion resource² developed for local government by the Australian Centre for Excellence in Local Government for the Australian Human Rights Commission.

² <http://www.acelg.org.au/socialcohesion>

7 General Comments

There is concern that the Strategy responds to the symptoms of extremism with little consideration to the causes. When any person feels they have no stake in their community or neighbourhood, there is an increased potential for extreme action or opinion. Council consultations and community program evaluations show that experiences of injustice (such as discrimination, ethnic profiling, dis-enfranchisement and racism), are very likely to be key drivers of violent extremism. These are multi-factorial, cumulative, intergenerational and driven by factors outside of religion and descent. The focus on preventing violent extremism seems narrow and reactive and may undermine the Strategy's objectives and principles.

While all Victorians are affected by a lack of social cohesion and can benefit from increased resilience, some suffer more than others. However, it is not just the victims of a lack of social cohesion who need to be targeted in this Strategy, but the perpetrators. This includes individuals preaching extremism of all kinds; that of a religious nature, and that of an anti-social nature. Both are contrary to Victoria's strength as a multicultural society.

There needs to be a specific recognition of the impact on victims of racism, discrimination and abuse in the development of actions under the Strategy. There should be a stated intention that initiatives will address racism in the public domain and other local settings.

There needs to be a specific recognition of the impact on victims of racism, discrimination and abuse in the development of actions under the Strategy. There should be a stated intention that initiatives will address racism in the public domain and other local settings. We know that Muslim Women for instance, are distressed by the high levels of discrimination they experience where they live, shop, enjoy leisure and drive (ECCV '*On the Road with Australian Muslim Mothers*'³ policy brief August 2015).

This has been recognised by the government in *Victoria's Advantage*, where it states that '*Essential to capitalising on the benefits our diversity offers is our ability to both embrace this diversity as strength and to maintain community harmony, by addressing challenges such as discrimination, racism, disengagement and isolation*'. This makes it clear that the way forward in Victoria for a strategy that remains true to Victoria's well tested and successful model of multiculturalism.

Evidence suggests tolerance of other religious and ethnic groups is a factor in resilience to violent extremism. Religious pluralism is an important feature of our democratic society and embedded in our Constitution. Section 116 states that the Commonwealth '*...shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion*'. As an alternative to teaching young people about specific religions, the Strategy should focus on religious pluralism through teaching based on Section 116 of our Constitution.

³ http://eccv.org.au/library/Final_ECCV_Social_Cohesion_Policy_Brief_4_Muslim_Mothers_SK.pdf

It will be important to address the underlying determinants of why people come to have extreme ideas that disrupt Victoria's social cohesion. For example; social isolation, decreased sense of belonging or identity, feelings of hopeless and insecurity.

Councils suggest that increased social, economic and cultural exclusion is related to increased racism and a lack of access to housing, employment, education and healthcare. As such, these primary needs must be acknowledged as critical factors in community disconnection and therefore, to rebuilding social cohesion. There is a need to invest not on responding to the current heightened anxiety, but on restoring fundamentals such as equity of access to primary needs and addressing feelings of insecurity, hopelessness and social isolation across all community groups regardless of a person's background.

Strategies with similar objectives to this Strategy have been delivered in other jurisdictions that manifestly failed by not being developed with the communities they aim to support. The UK Government's Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) response to the threat of domestic Islamist terrorism within their wider CONTEST⁴ (counter-terrorism) strategy, has been found to be largely ineffectual by widespread political and academic scrutiny. It is said that it directly attacks the Muslim community in the UK, and strikes at the heart of long established civil liberties.

This draft Strategy's assumed mono-cultural focus on Muslims stands in contrast to Victoria's vision for '*...a cohesive, multicultural society (that) recognises the need to build resilient communities that have strong social networks and a sense of belonging to the broader Victorian society. Being closely engaged and connected to the broader society, communities are able to respond better to challenges and adversity, and are also better placed to make positive contributions to our society*'.

Equally important is to ensure that in the Strategy's implementation, women are not negatively affected by perceptions of male dominance. Its roll-out should aim to ensure there are no constraints blocking the participation of females, by empowering them to play an active part in its design.

One council pointed out that the Strategy must be mindful of minority groups excluding and insulating themselves from mainstream society, particularly if they do so as they believe it is the only safe way to preserve their cultural identity. Similarly, they noted that radicalisation is not necessarily, something to be prevented; 'it is important to acknowledge that we all have multiple identities, ideas and allegiances. The ability and permission to rebel against family and community norms is an indicator of a harmonious and resilient community. The fundamental project for Australia and Australians is to become bigger, not smaller'.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/counter-terrorism-strategy-contest>

8 Examples of work currently being undertaken by local government

In developing actions for the Strategy, it is important that the government consider the range of initiatives currently being implemented by councils across Victoria that support social cohesion and build on these. Some of these include:

- the work undertaken by Interfaith Networks
- multicultural or bi-lingual playgroups
- projects such as the Clayton CANVAS program and Braybrook FILLS program which have an intergenerational, site-based focus reaching people where they live, work, and study
- projects with young people that focus on diversity, social cohesion and civic participation
- Women's Friendship Groups
- a range of community events, programs and campaigns that bring together culturally diverse and 'mainstream' communities
- the 100 Resilient Cities program led by the City of Melbourne and involving the 31 metropolitan Melbourne councils

In addition, most councils have policies, frameworks, plans, strategies and other documents that specifically address social cohesion and community resilience. For example, Maribyrnong City Council developed a 'Shared Approach to Safety in the City of Maribyrnong'. More examples can be provided at request, or by referring to council websites. Some have shared their related initiatives below.

Hobson Bay City Council

Behind This Smile community art project challenged cultural stereotypes and promoted cultural diversity in Hobsons Bay. The project developed very strong visual presence in the municipality and demonstrated council's commitment to multiculturalism and leadership in stamping out racism. Twelve local residents reflecting the diversity of the municipality in terms of age, gender, cultural and religious backgrounds were invited to share their stories and portraits. With the support of an artist and a facilitator, they developed powerful and insightful stories. This inspired artwork which is displayed on windows across five community venues and on Council flags and postcards. The project was successful in giving local residents a voice and starting a positive conversation about the impacts of racism on individuals and ways to break down barriers between people - with conversation, dialogue, a smile, getting to know each other and making all people feel valued and accepted.

Karen Healthy Food and Living Program and Peer Facilitators is pilot program developed to assist newly arrived Karen families to live healthier lives by building their capacity to understand their local environment, with a focus on healthy, affordable, connected and sustainable living, particularly with regards to access to food. Natural leaders emerged during the pilot and a peer facilitator training was developed. This program helped them to recognise and acknowledge their leadership skills and valuable life experiences. It also developed and enhanced their skills

and capacity as peer facilitators to assist in the development, content and delivery of the Karen Healthy Food and Living Program 2015.

City of Greater Dandenong

Federal Attorney General funding: Living Safely Together supports professional development for service providers on radicalisation and social cohesion.

An *Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship (OMAC) funded program* engages community service organisations, agencies, volunteers groups, schools and businesses in initiatives that increase social cohesion across the municipality.

The employment of a *project worker* to engage community and support social cohesion initiatives.

The provision of *cultural awareness training and information for all staff* to work effectively with culturally diverse groups and individuals.

Social cohesion messages rolled out by Council including the 'Racism. Get-Up. Speak Out', 'Not in my name' and the 'White Ribbon Day' campaign to reject racism, race based discrimination and violence in all its forms.

Community Safety Advisory Committee emphasises Supporting Diversity and Promoting Harmony as a priority area.

Key agency forum, 'Creating change through dialogue' focussed on radicalisation that leads to extreme violence.

I Speak Football social cohesion project facilitated by young people to address racism, discrimination, equality and leadership.

Lets talk: Refugee Week Event, supports social cohesion among young people through the sharing of ideas and experiences.

Refugee Welcome Zone and Asylum Seeker and Refugee Asylum Committee promote cultural, linguistic and religious diversity; community harmony and respect for all.

Support for the Greater Dandenong Interfaith Network and Interfaith Tours to encourage learning about diversity and the religious and spiritual dimensions of multiculturalism.

Providing support for families and parents who are concerned about their children being radicalised or impacted by radicalisation.

Libraries are considered a hub with opportunities for learning and information access with programs that support social inclusion, these include:

- Language and Literacy activities with an emphasis on extended opening hours

- 'Talking Faith Forums'
- 'Social Knitwork' youth activation, gaming and multimedia programs

Whittlesea City Council

Whittlesea partnered with VicHealth to deliver the highly successful Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) program across the City of Whittlesea over 3 years to 2014.

Subsequently, after extensive community consultation *Building Respect: Whittlesea's Strategy to Reduce Racism 2015-2019* was adopted by Council in August 2015. Over the next four years the Strategy will guide the implementation of actions including direct participation projects that will break down barriers in the community, strengthen social cohesion, combat racism and intolerance through sharing local stories, build staff capacity and work with local media to generate positive messages.