

Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities

INTRODUCTION



One of Victoria's greatest assets is its open, accepting and diverse society. We are all stronger – socially, economically and culturally – because of it. This cohesive, open society is built on the principle that every person has the right to live free from discrimination or humiliation due to their faith, ethnicity, gender or sexuality.

By all international comparisons, Australia is one of the world's most successful and cohesive multicultural nations. The Scanlon Foundation's *Mapping Social Cohesion 2015* report found that Australia continues to have a high level of social cohesion and, within Australia, Victoria stands out for its high level of respect for diversity and multiculturalism.

However, there have been a small number of violent incidents in Australia, including in Victoria, which have been motivated by extreme racial and religious views, and which undermine the cohesive fabric of our communities. As Victorians, we need to work together to safeguard the open, cohesive society we have built. This includes challenging inflexible, intolerant and discriminatory views and behaviours where these exist.

The full force of the law must be used against those who carry out or plan violence against our community. The Government has nothing but praise for the work of Victoria Police in keeping us safe. However, this is only one part of what we must do. We also need to prevent this violence arising in the first place. Prevention is the main focus of this Framework.

Recent attacks on innocent civilians, including the horrendous events in Paris, Beirut and Ankara, were designed by ISIS-inspired terrorists with the explicit purpose of dividing communities. If we turn away from our open, accepting and diverse society it will give extremists a victory. This is why it is more important than ever for us to strengthen Victoria's social cohesion and the resilience of our communities.

This important work involves a complex set of factors in which global and local issues intersect.

The Victorian Government's ability to influence the course of global conflicts is limited. It can, however, work in partnership with local communities and other stakeholders to reduce the impact of these events on Victorian society.

A key purpose of the Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities (the Framework) is to guide the Victorian Government in how to further strengthen Victoria's social cohesion, and how to build and empower resilient communities in order to prevent and reverse the development of racial, ethnic and religious intolerance that can lead to violence.

The Framework has been developed with the involvement of a broad range of community and not-for-profit organisations, government agencies, community members, Australian and international academics and philanthropic foundations. It recognises that government action alone can never be sufficient to fully address the social cohesion and community resilience challenges we face, and that consequently governments and communities need to work together.

The Victorian Government is therefore focusing on working with communities, community organisations, local governments and other stakeholders in Victoria to develop local projects and initiatives that can help us maintain the values of the Victorian community we take such pride in. The Framework is intended to guide and align our shared efforts to deal with specific problems in ways that do not undermine the very social cohesion we want to preserve and strengthen.

The Framework covers two specific but related issues - how governments, communities, academics and other stakeholders can work together to:

- protect and enhance the social cohesion and resilience of our communities and society as a whole; and
- develop initiatives that help to prevent a small group of individuals, or networks of individuals, harming our cohesive society through violent extremism.



SOCIAL COHESION AND RESILIENCE

A key priority of the Framework is to support all Victorians to have a strong sense of belonging, whatever their religion, ethnicity, skin colour, or cultural identity. Those without a sufficient sense of belonging can feel rejected and isolated. We aim to safeguard, nurture and grow the diverse society that helps make Victoria a welcoming place in which to live, visit and invest.

The Framework uses the social cohesion model developed by the Scanlon Foundation and Monash University for the *Mapping Social Cohesion* longitudinal study. The social cohesion model includes five domains:

- 1. Belonging:** Shared values, identification with Australia, trust.
- 2. Social justice and equity:** equality of opportunity and trust in institutions.
- 3. Participation:** Voluntary work, political and co-operative involvement.
- 4. Acceptance and rejection, legitimacy:** Experience of discrimination, attitudes towards minorities and newcomers.
- 5. Worth:** Life satisfaction and happiness, future expectations.

The *Mapping Social Cohesion* 2015 study found that Victoria continues to have a high level of social cohesion, but there are challenges which need to be addressed.

The Framework calls on Victorians to help address those challenges. It aims to further strengthen the social cohesion which underpins our shared safety, prosperity and wellbeing.

A socially cohesive society is also a resilient society. The Framework uses the broad definition of resilience adopted by the Rockefeller Foundation's global *100 Resilient Cities* program.

The 100 Resilient Cities program defines resilience as the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems to survive, adapt and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.

Building resilient communities is important because they are more likely to adapt in positive and healthy ways to changes or challenges in natural, economic or social circumstances. Our social resilience in Victoria is built upon the diversity and strength of all our various individual and community links and relationships. Division between people or groups in our communities reduces the diversity and strength of our networks, weakens our social cohesion, and limits our ability to adapt proactively to change and unexpected events.

Connected communities are resilient communities because they are ready to look after each other in times of crisis, whether that be a flood, a bushfire or an incident of violent extremism. They function reliably and well when under stress; successfully adapt; are self-reliant; and have high levels of social support, social cohesion and social capacity. These social support systems include neighbourhood; family and kinship networks; intergenerational supports; good links between communities, institutions and services; and mutual self-help groups.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, which the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed in 2011, points out that:

"...achieving [community] resilience will require sustained behavioural change, the results of which should be seen across a number of years and political cycles."

Achieving the objectives of the Framework will also require long-term commitment. Social cohesion and community resilience require continued investment by communities, governments, service providers, academics, philanthropists, businesses and individuals to keep them strong. Governments alone cannot make or keep society cohesive or communities resilient. This is a shared responsibility for all of us.

SOCIAL COHESION, IDEOLOGY AND VIOLENCE



There are a small number of individuals across Australia, including in Victoria, whose beliefs and actions threaten other people's free exercise of their democratic rights and freedoms. Ideologically motivated violence is usually based on a belief that one race, ethnicity or religion is 'better' than another and that there is only one 'good' or 'right' way to live. Actions motivated by such extreme ideas – which can occur across a wide political and social spectrum – undermine social cohesion and have no place in an accepting, democratic society. Whether a person is a right-wing or ISIS-inspired extremist, neither is acceptable.

The Victorian Government's approach includes understanding why violent extremism arises and addressing its root causes. The evidence strongly suggests that this is not a problem of whole communities in our society, but rather that of a small number of individuals and their personal networks.

Young people wrestling with issues such as social isolation, family breakdown, mental health concerns or identity challenges can be particularly vulnerable. Lonely, confused, frustrated by a lack of purpose and belonging and feeling a sense of emptiness in life, some people seek to fill the gap by turning to crime, criminal gangs, or substance abuse. Others may be susceptible and vulnerable to extremist ideologies which offer false promises and rewards that appear to fill this gap. These vulnerable individuals are often deliberately targeted by extremists in Australia or overseas.

The Framework is not focussed on legislative or law enforcement measures. Where individuals are planning or engaging in acts of criminal violence, that is a matter for law enforcement. However, cohesive, resilient societies also recognise the need for prevention and early intervention efforts that aim to stop individuals starting or continuing along a path of violence against the rest of society,

in pursuit of extremist ideologies. There is no one process or pathway to violent extremism. As the combination of causes and drivers are unique to each individual there needs to be a number of differing approaches. The Framework seeks to guide effective ways for governments, community organisations, communities, families and young people to work together to create initiatives that can both prevent individuals being drawn into violent extremism in the first place, and assist in their disengagement.

The White House Summit on preventing violent extremism held in the United States in February 2015 explicitly supports this approach, emphasising that:

"Effectively preventing the spread of violent extremism in different communities requires localized, specialized, and expanded efforts, thus reinforcing the need to further empower youth, families, and women, as well as religious, cultural and education leaders, and all other concerned civil society actors, and to adopt tailored approaches, including those sensitive to local cultures and religious beliefs, to addressing this phenomenon."

The Victorian Government is following this approach.



MANY CONTRIBUTIONS

The Framework recognises that we are dealing with a set of complex issues that are inter-connected and can be difficult to fully understand. Therefore drawing on broad expertise and creating a range of initiatives which are locally owned and led by communities is critical. Initiatives driven by governments alone will not succeed, nor will any approaches that are solely driven from the 'top down'.

One purpose of the Framework is to invite new ways of working to design and deliver innovative, locally appropriate initiatives.

In May 2015 the Victorian Government announced the commitment of \$25 million over four years to facilitate collective action across governments, community and academia to strengthen social cohesion and community resilience, and prevent violent extremism. The funding is administered by the Social Cohesion and Community Resilience Ministerial Taskforce (the Taskforce). The Taskforce developed the Framework which identifies key policy and thematic priorities to guide the allocation of funding and support the alignment of initiatives across sectors.

Through the Taskforce, a significant amount of work is already being undertaken by communities, businesses, service providers, governments, philanthropists, academia, sporting clubs and many others on a number of initiatives. These initiatives are being co-designed to strengthen social cohesion and resilience and to empower local communities and community groups to help prevent individuals being drawn into violent extremist activity.

It is anticipated that the Framework will provide an opportunity for new connections and conversations to occur between those already involved - and those who want to become involved - in this important work to ensure that our collective efforts are better aligned and able to achieve greater impact.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Framework outlines how we as governments, communities, academics, service providers, philanthropic foundations, businesses and other stakeholders can work together to further strengthen Victoria’s social cohesion and build community resilience.



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| Vision | <p>An inclusive Victoria which embraces its rich diversity as a precious community asset in itself and supports people to thrive and respond better to change in a complex, unpredictable world.</p> |
| Objectives | <p>To create initiatives that will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Empower communities, particularly young people, to address economic, social and cultural issues that may lead to individual or community isolation, anti-social behaviour, including violence, and to build community resilience to prevent violent extremism. 2. Develop our understanding of the driving factors that strengthen or undermine social cohesion and community resilience. 3. Support a socially cohesive Victoria underpinned by social justice and equity in which all its people have a sense of belonging, acceptance and worth, and have equal opportunity to participate meaningfully in all aspects of society. 4. Increase inter-community and inter-cultural interaction and understanding, building the recognition that shared values and the foundations of common humanity transcend cultural and religious difference. |
| Principles | <p><i>How we do this work is just as important as which initiatives we undertake.</i></p> <p>We recognise that these are complex issues which require a high degree of collaboration and trust between governments and communities; between different communities; and between individuals and civil society.</p> <p>1. Shared responsibility</p> <p>No one sector, community, institution or organisation can solve these issues alone, nor can one single age cohort. Empowering and equipping young people is key to successfully engaging with many of the challenges we face. This necessitates reaching beyond established community leaders and existing programs.</p> <p>We will engage with a broad range of stakeholders to identify common interests and benefits that might be achieved by working together. This will help to secure broad ownership of strategies and goals and engender long-term commitment to being part of the solution.</p> <p>2. New ways of working together</p> <p>Initiatives will be co-created with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure they build on existing community strengths and reflect the local context. This includes working across areas such as education, employment, the arts, sports, and local government sectors, both face-to-face and online.</p> <p>We will encourage and support communities, government agencies, businesses, service providers, philanthropic foundations, young people, academia and others to work together to identify key challenges and opportunities, and create innovative initiatives together. We will establish equity among stakeholders and support regular communication and the building of trust through positive partnerships.</p> <p>A measured willingness to take some risks with new and innovative ideas, and a tolerance for some failures is essential. This innovative, experimental approach is increasingly being used around the world to address social issues where the solutions are unclear and where no single entity has the authority or resources to bring about the necessary change.</p> |

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (cont)

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| <p>Principles</p> | <p>3. Evidence-informed</p> <p>New research, data from government and other sources, and community knowledge will be used to enable existing and new initiatives to achieve the greatest impact.</p> <p>We will commission and source research and evaluations and recognise community insights as an important source of knowledge. We will seek out potentially useful data sets from government and others sources, and work through issues (such as privacy) to enable the data to be shared in an appropriate way to support collective efforts. Opportunities will be created for regular reflection and learning to adapt and respond to changing local circumstances, and identify promising and best practices which can be shared with others.</p> <hr/> <p>4. Sustainability</p> <p>Sustainability needs to be considered from the outset given the long-term nature of social change.</p> <p>We will seek the buy-in and commitment of a broad range of stakeholders - including young people and those not necessarily recognised as leaders; strive to influence the policies and practices of Government and other stakeholders; build community capability, and enable the establishment of new relationships across sectoral and organisational boundaries.</p> <hr/> <p>5. Governance</p> <p>Governance arrangements will ensure shared accountability, transparency and participation whilst also providing flexibility for innovative collaborations.</p> <p>We will establish a culture and practice which supports shared decision-making and shared accountability for outcomes.</p> <p>We will set and undertake periodic reviews of governance arrangements to respond to changing circumstances, to incorporate the emerging evidence base and to promote shared responsibility.</p> |
| <p>Priority Themes</p> | <p>Priority themes to be addressed have been identified by a broad range of stakeholders during the development of the Framework, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognising the unique contributions made by religion and culture in the formation of identity and the development of a sense of belonging. 2. Improving education and employment outcomes. 3. Developing leadership and advocacy capability, including amongst young people. 4. The impact of media and public discourse, including new media. 5. Facilitating meaningful, sustained interaction between diverse communities. 6. Enhancing support for communities to play a greater role in challenging ideas which undermine community harmony such as right wing extremism, ISIS-inspired extremism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. 7. Encouraging the exploration and resolution of concerns through democratic means. |

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK (cont)



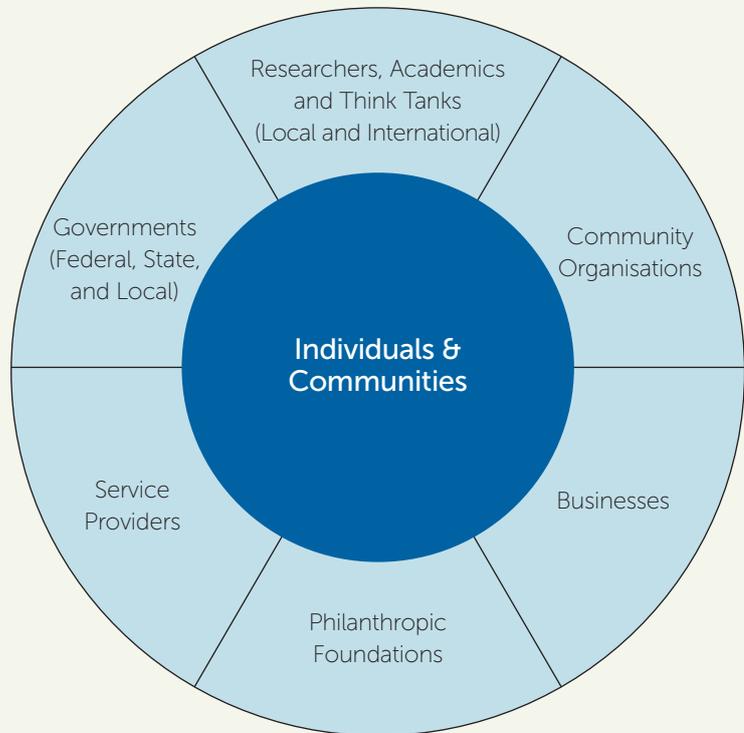
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| <p>Priority Actions</p> | <p>To enable and support initiatives which address the priority themes the Victorian Government will undertake the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establish governance, infrastructure and funding mechanisms to develop and implement community co-produced and evidence-informed policy. 2. Seek out and encourage communities and other stakeholders to develop initiatives based on local needs. 3. Joint work across government, community organisations, researchers, businesses, communities, families and young people to develop initiatives to prevent individuals being drawn to violent extremism, and pathways to rehabilitate those who have become enmeshed in violent extremism. 4. Support initiatives that strengthen the resilience of diverse communities through building their capacity to engage in civil society, increasing their understanding of human rights, and through intercultural and interfaith understanding. 5. Work across government to achieve greater equity of educational and employment outcomes for young people from Victoria’s diverse communities. 6. Explore ways to engage young people in leadership roles as Victoria’s future custodians. 7. Develop a multi-faceted communication strategy working across social media, communities and governments. 8. Enable positive public narratives around cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. 9. Support the development of alternative narratives which challenge the racially and religiously intolerant views underpinning violent extremism. 10. Engage with philanthropic foundations and other partners to develop alternative funding and delivery models. 11. Partner in the delivery of the <i>Resilient Melbourne</i> project initiated through the <i>100 Resilient Cities</i> program. 12. Influence the alignment of efforts across Victorian Government agencies. 13. Commission research and evaluations to continue to build an evidence base for what works well. |
| <p>Indicators</p> | <p>The Victorian Government is working with VicHealth, Community Indicators Victoria, the McCaughey VicHealth Centre for Community Wellbeing, the Scanlon Foundation and others to identify appropriate indicators to monitor the impact of the collective efforts of stakeholders in achieving the Framework’s objectives. Indicators will use existing data sets (e.g. social isolation, social capital) where possible to understand the extent to which:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People, especially young people, feel a sense of belonging. 2. People, especially young people, feel empowered and able to actively participate in the community. 3. The wider Victorian community is more accepting of people from diverse backgrounds, and actively values and upholds their human rights. 4. Communities are empowered to support individuals to disengage from extreme views which may undermine community harmony. |
| <p>Review</p> | <p>In order to ensure currency, the Framework will be reviewed annually.</p> |



STAKEHOLDERS & IMPLEMENTATION

We will work together with a broad range of stakeholders to achieve the Framework's vision and objectives. Implementing priority actions will involve the establishment of partnerships between communities, governments, not-for-profit entities and other stakeholders. Many such partnerships already exist and others are likely to emerge, reflecting the need for solutions which draw on local knowledge and expertise.

The diagram on the right illustrates the stakeholders which will be involved in this work.



RESEARCH

The Research Institute on Social Cohesion (RIOSC) has been established to ensure our collective efforts are evidence-informed. The Victorian Government will fund research in three priority areas:

Social Cohesion and Multiculturalism

- Develop understanding of the value of social cohesion, multiculturalism and diversity.
- Develop innovative methodologies and theories for assessing social cohesion, multiculturalism, community resilience and inclusion.

Community Polarisation and Marginalisation

- Develop understanding of the roots of, and relationship between, community polarisation, marginalisation and violent extremism.

Project Innovation

- Identify new projects and activities that revitalise social cohesion, multiculturalism and diversity.
- Identify new projects and activities that build individual and community resilience to racial, ethnic and religious exclusivism, including violent extremism.
- Evaluation of projects and activities funded by the Taskforce, including the development of innovative evaluation methodologies.

FUNDING PRIORITIES



Funding will be provided to initiatives which build social cohesion at a community level, and initiatives which target individuals who may be radicalising towards violent extremism. The diagram below illustrates the four funding categories.

| Category | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|------------|--|---|---|---|
| Focus | Individual - early intervention | Individual - intervention | Capacity Building | Whole of Community |
| Priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build intervention programs to prevent violent extremism. • Empower communities, including families, young leaders, peers and community leaders to engage and support at-risk individuals. • Raise awareness across community and government to assist in the identification of at-risk individuals. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop or support rehabilitation and reintegration programs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional development opportunities for key stakeholders, including religious and community leaders. • Develop material and messages that challenge narratives that promote violence, hatred and intolerance. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build social cohesion and community resilience. • Promote inter-cultural, inter-religious and intra-religious engagement and understanding. • Strengthen and revitalise multiculturalism. • Promote political, economic and social participation, equity and opportunity. • Support participation in society by CALD young people, including through sports and cultural initiatives. |

