

Public Service Commission

# Increasing cultural diversity in the NSW government sector senior executive cohort



Enabling a world class  
public service





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# Acknowledgements

## Acknowledgement of Country

The New South Wales Public Service Commission acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this Strategy.

We advise that this resource may contain images, voices or names of deceased people in photographs and through testimony or quotations.

## Acknowledgement of lived experience

The voices of people with lived experience have been key in developing this program of work. We place lived experience at the heart of all we do, and value inclusive co-design principles as we bring projects to life.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all NSW government sector employees who participated in sector consultations that informed the development of this program of work and acknowledge the value of their individual and collective contributions.



# Glossary

Acronyms used throughout this report:

**CALD:** Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

**D&I:** Diversity and Inclusion – this is the term to describe the broader field of this work. Other acronyms used across the sector include:

- **DIB:** Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging
- **DEI:** Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

**ERG:** Employee Resource Group – networks built by employees outside of the remit of their regular positions. ERGs often form around shared life experience and identified needs.

**PMES:** People Matter Employee Survey. This is an annual survey conducted by the PSC for employees across the sector, asking for their experience and perceptions on a range of workplace issues and practices.

**PSC:** Public Service Commission

## A note on the term ‘CALD’

For the purpose of our consultations, we used the term ‘CALD’. This refers to cultural, linguistic and ethno-religious diversity. The consultations were open to employees who self-identify as CALD. However, the term can be complicated, lack clarity and is sometimes used as a ‘catch all’ for different experiences. We recognise the recent conversations on inclusive language, including research published on culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) women by Diversity Council Australia.<sup>1</sup>

For consistency with our consultations, the term ‘CALD’ is used in this report. However, we note that cultural diversity is not a monolith, and we centre lived experience in planning and building programs.

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<sup>1</sup> DCA Research – *Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership, A Framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, 2023, Mapedzahama, Laffernis, Barhoum and O’Leary.

# A message from the Public Service Commissioner



NSW is home to rich cultural diversity, with around half the population identifying as being culturally diverse. Together, we represent more than 300 ancestries, 144 religions and speak more than 275 different languages. However, this diversity is not reflected in our workplaces, and especially not at the senior executive level.

The past few years have further highlighted the importance of having government sector senior executives who reflect the cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of the NSW population. The critical role of leaders from culturally diverse backgrounds in the government's pandemic response reinforced that cultural diversity is a strength.

In 2022, the PSC embarked on consultations with CALD employees across the sector to explore barriers and opportunities in relation to career progression. This report summarises key outcomes of the consultations, and what we plan to do as a result.

The business case for diversity is well established. Research demonstrates that diverse organisations and teams perform better across a range of metrics, including customer service and productivity. Diversity promotes better problem-solving and greater innovation. These are essential elements of a world class public service.

We also know the pivotal role of senior executives in shaping organisational culture. One of the reflections we heard time and time again during our consultations is that “you can't be what you can't see”. **Greater representation of cultural diversity at the senior executive level creates a cyclical process, and having visibility of diverse leaders shows people “see, you can be a leader”.**

During the sector consultations, employees reflected that **‘there is no one way to be a leader’**. A key piece of our program of work to increase cultural diversity in senior leadership reflects this. We aim to leverage the strengths in different leadership styles and the diversity of thought which people from culturally diverse backgrounds bring.

Our program of work takes a systems-based approach. We focus on creating pathways for existing employees and understanding the systemic and compounding barriers. **To address representation at the senior executive level, the whole NSW government sector needs to be a workplace where people from any cultural background feel welcomed, included, and that they belong.**

Lived experience voices are at the heart of our program of work, and we will continue giving culturally diverse employees the opportunity to share their stories and contribute to this work. At the PSC, we are uniquely placed to support the development of sector networks, spotlight existing good practice, and make connections.

I am proud that the PSC is leading the work that is needed to achieve greater diversity in the sector's senior executive cohort. While I may have been the first culturally diverse person to sit on the NSW Secretaries Board, I am committed to making sure that I am the first of many.

**Kathrina Lo**

Public Service Commissioner



# Introduction

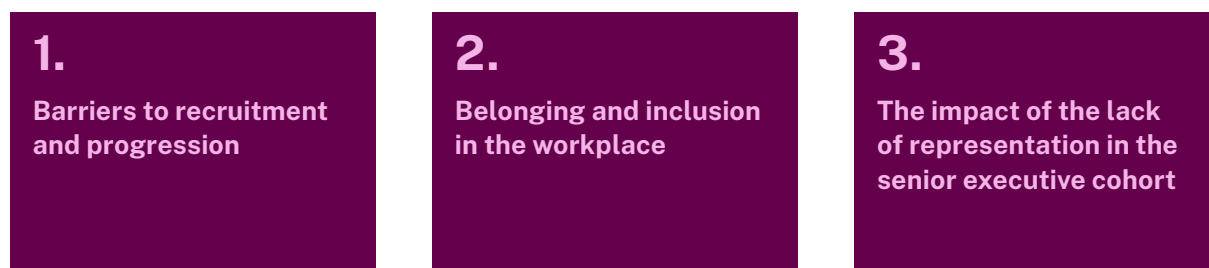
In November 2021, the PSC submitted a paper to the NSW Secretaries Board, proposing that the PSC lead work to increase cultural diversity in the government sector senior executive cohort.<sup>2</sup> Following endorsement of this proposal by the Board, the PSC undertook consultations with CALD staff across the sector during 2022. We originally planned to hold four focus groups, but ultimately held eleven, indicating a need by CALD employees to feel heard and a desire for change.

Focus group discussions covered:

- opportunities and barriers/challenges for CALD employee's success in the government sector<sup>3</sup>
- racism and discrimination CALD employees experienced during their government sector careers
- what could make the sector a more inclusive place to work.

This report brings together government sector workforce data and the stories of CALD employees. While the data provides a high-level view of workforce composition and experience, understanding the lived experiences of employees provides the depth and nuance that are critical to co-designing initiatives.

We have grouped the stories of lived experience shared by employees into three key areas:



We then outline proposed projects that are being developed in response to consultation data. This work will take place across three horizons, beginning in 2023 and building towards sustainability in the future.

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2 The term 'senior leader' was used in focus groups to guide discussion. However, participants used 'senior leader' and 'senior executives' interchangeably. Throughout this report, we have preserved the terms participants used in their quotes. In other instances, we have referred to 'senior executives' to align with our program of work and data collection definitions.

3 The term 'public sector' was in used in focus groups to guide discussion. However, participants also used 'public sector' and 'government sector' interchangeably. Throughout this report we have preserved the terms participants used in their quotes. In other instances, we have referred to 'government sector' to align with our program of work and data collection definitions.



## The PSC's role in inclusion for CALD employees

The PSC plays a leading role in driving government sector diversity and inclusion initiatives. In February 2022, we launched our [Belonging and Inclusion Strategy](#), which provides an overarching, holistic, integrated and intersectional approach to diversity and inclusion. The strategy outlines the role of the PSC as a central agency to connect, promote and support sector partners, and elevate lived experience voices in policy design.

The PSC has taken the lead in relation to workforce cultural diversity, proposing a program of work to the NSW Secretaries Board in November 2021. We commenced our work by reviewing our data collection relating to people from culturally diverse backgrounds. We then consulted with employees across the sector who identified as being from a culturally, linguistically or racially diverse background. This approach ensures strategies to increase cultural diversity directly address the needs and respond to the lived experience of these employees.

Consistent with our Belonging and Inclusion Strategy, our approach to this work is based on intersectionality, co-design and partnership to leverage the PSC's position as trusted advisor and to drive leading practice in the sector.



# Part 1

# Data and consultation

The senior executive cohort in the NSW government sector does not reflect the diversity of the population of our State. In 2022, the PSC consulted with CALD employees across the sector to explore why.





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“Career progression only possible through **suppressing our cultural values and re-inventing our persona** to be more 'Australian'.”

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“Diversity and inclusion initiatives force us to conform to the predominant white culture rather than creating spaces where all cultures are equal. **We shouldn't have to compromise who we are just to function in the workplace.**”

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“That’s the big issue in the recruitment process, that nobody is looking at things holistically and examining the biases that are there. Things I’ve heard on panels, for example, about criticising the quality of people’s English, or making comments about where they went to school. **They would be horrified if someone said that was racist, but it absolutely is.**”

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“I’m often the only Asian or Chinese person in meetings at my workplace or one of two, and **they still get our names wrong.**”

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“**We always have to start against the stereotype**, against some assumptions that were based on your background or how you look. It’s exhausting. I think we all kind of get used to it, but we forget that we are not given the same chances.”

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# Current workforce profile data on cultural diversity

Workforce Profile Data shows us that cultural diversity in the government sector does not match the cultural diversity of NSW.

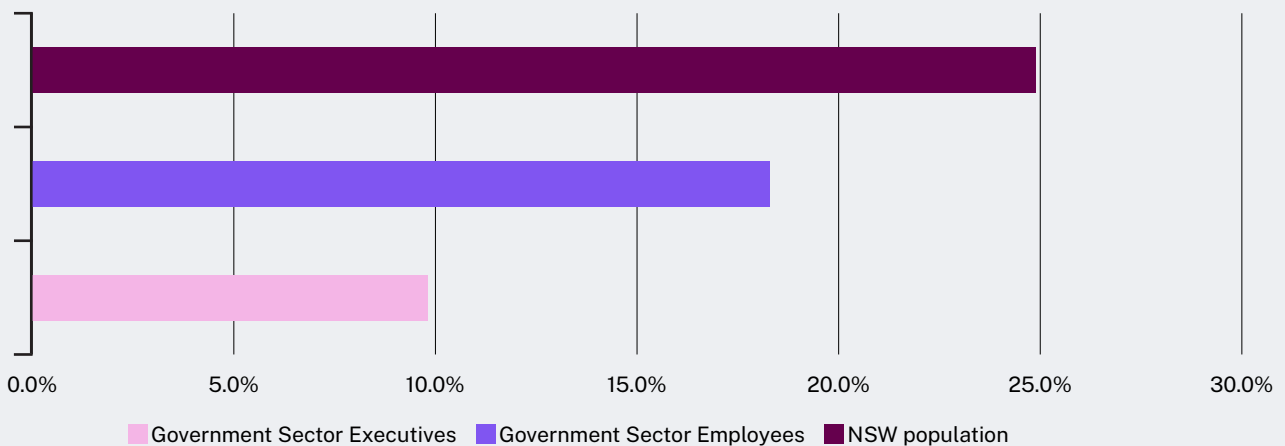
**50%** in 2021  
**NSW population from a non-majority English-speaking background**

**14%** in 2022  
**Government Sector Employees from a racial, ethnic, or ethno-religious minority group**

The current population of NSW is approximately 8 million. According to the 2021 census, around 50% of the NSW population comes from Non-Majority-English-Speaking Backgrounds.<sup>4</sup> While language is only one marker of multiculturalism, this statistic indicates how diverse our state is. Census data also shows that around 25% of the Australian population have a non-European CALD background, while 18% have a European CALD background.<sup>5</sup>

NSW Workforce Profile government sector data shows that 14.0% of employees identify as belonging to a minority group, while 18.3% identified their first language spoken was not English. Although executive representation was similar for those belonging to a minority group, at an estimated 14.1%, only 9.8% of senior executives identified their first language spoken was not English.

**Figure 1: Representation of people with English as a second language<sup>6</sup>**



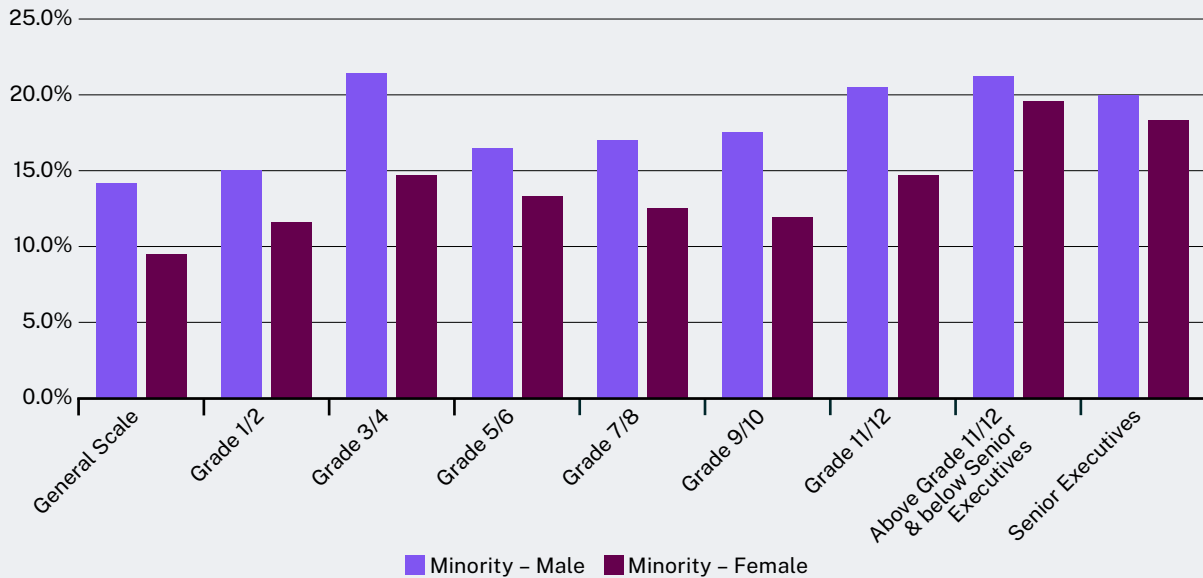
4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census

5 Media Diversity Australia, *Who Gets to Tell Australian Stories 2.0 2022*; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census; NSW Public Service Commission, *Workforce Profile Collection 2022*

Women from culturally diverse backgrounds are under-represented in the workforce compared with men from culturally diverse backgrounds. This disparity exists across both the workforce as a whole and at senior executive level.

**Figure 2: Government sector distribution of employees who identify as being from a racial, ethnic or ethno-religious minority by gender and grade (estimate), 2022**



The under-representation of CALD people is most pronounced at the highest levels of the senior executive cohort. 10% of senior executives at the Band 2 level identify as being from racial, ethnic, or ethno-religious minority groups, and less than 8% of Band 3 and 4 senior executives are from racial, ethnic, or ethno-religious minority groups.

**Figure 3: Government sector representation of senior executives from a racial, ethnic, or ethno-religious minority by senior executive band (estimate), 2022**



PMES data shows that CALD employees experience racism and discrimination in the government sector, with 8% (4,216 responses) of respondents having experienced racism and 11% (5,832 responses) having experienced discrimination, compared to 9% of non-CALD employees.

People who are from CALD backgrounds also experience discrimination and racism differently depending on their gender identity, sexuality, disability and other intersections of identity. Quantitative data is useful in understanding the broader picture of what CALD employees are experiencing. **Qualitative data enables us to deepen our understanding of experiences and develop a more person-centred approach.**

# Barriers to recruitment and progression

Barriers relating to job applications and recruitment were cited by focus group participants throughout our consultation process. These included inaccessibility of the application process, experiences of bias, and lack of representation on recruitment panels.



“You have to have a **high level of understanding of Australian cultural constructs** to be able even to apply for the selection criteria. That will take you a day worth of work, if not more, to address those questions and know how to present yourself in front of an interview panel. It took me years to learn that.”

“The recruitment assessment is **biased towards people who have English as their primary language.**”

“Too often interview panels are made up of people who don’t look like me, that does come back to **unconscious bias.**”

Our consultations also highlighted issues around career progression. Focus group discussions covered a perceived lack of transparency around opportunities for progression, with favour seemingly being given to non-CALD employees. Delving more deeply, participants shared experiences of workplace cultural barriers, how the **lack of recognition for overseas experience impacts career progression, and direct experiences of bias and racism.**

## Hiring bias

“I am an Executive Officer and I have been involved in recruitment processes for executives. I’ve observed racist comments in recruitment, with hiring managers critiquing where applicants went to school and criticising the quality of people’s English.

I’ve observed that leadership either don’t care or don’t think there’s a problem when their attention is brought to the fact that leadership teams are not representative of the community’s diversity. This is a conscious bias.”

## Discrimination and recruitment

“I recently interviewed with a different NSW Government department to where I currently work. The panel told me that they did not expect me to be a person of colour because of my name.

The panel also then made comments about how I spoke English well and with an Australian accent, and I was then told that the position in a regional area of NSW would not be a good ‘cultural fit’ for me.

I felt like the panel were saying ‘you’re too brown for a regional area’, ignoring the fact that there is a need for employees with my technical expertise and experience. I tend to experience this a lot.”

## Experiences of bias

Bias was the most common discussion point during the focus groups. Participants cited examples of how structural bias impacts their everyday workplace experience.



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“I am a first-generation migrant. My name is not the name I was born with, **I changed my name** after arriving in Australia, after experiencing difficulty in career progression.”

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“I feel like there are times you do so much, you achieve so much and it’s still not enough, and you wonder to yourself ‘what more do I have to do to be able to demonstrate I can go to the next level’. It feels like white people are given opportunities ‘because of their potential’ but for people of colour, **we have to constantly prove ourselves and be perfect to be promoted.**”

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“I was at a branch meeting in which one of the directors referred to the team that I’m in as ‘the team with the three Indian women’, and I felt like ‘oh my god, **is that actually just how you see us?**”

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Focus group participants also emphasized the need to understand intersectional experiences of bias.



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“I am a woman from an Asian background and unwanted comments about my appearance and racial background are commonplace. I was told by one male colleague that I looked ‘very oriental’ as a ‘compliment’, and I had another male colleague comment that I have an ‘exotic look’ even though I was born and raised in Australia. **This nuance of cultural background and gender is left out in the conversation around sexism and sexual harassment, and also something male CALD colleagues don’t understand, so these experiences feel very isolating.**”

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“I remember this one time I worked on a floor with only one other woman who wore hijab who looks very different to me, and one of these white middle-aged men came up to me and he had just assumed that I was her and I had to point out to him that I wasn’t her. I thought why should I have to point that out to him? I worked with so many white middle-aged men and I could tell them apart. **They couldn’t even make an effort to distinguish the two of us who looked very different from one another.**”

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“I have been told by the executive at my department that “it’s easier for people from culturally diverse backgrounds who are women because they tick all the boxes”, whereas that’s just not true, **it’s actually more difficult for us.**”

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“As a neuro-diverse person, **I feel tokenised** – almost like I have my job because people want to help me, rather than me actually being capable and good at what I do.”

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## Workplace cultural barriers

This theme encompasses how employees reported feeling excluded from perceived 'Australian workplace culture' and feeling a lack of cultural belonging due to their cultural background.



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"Often Asian cultures imbue respect for hierarchy which **affects our ability to speak up in meetings or to executives.**"

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"**Some cultures are more outspoken than others.** It can be hard to be heard or chosen if you're from a more reserved culture."

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"You have to **know 'footy'** to get liked or to be promoted."

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"A lot of career growth is based on networking skills and being extroverted, which is **much harder when English is not your first language.**"

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### Career progression

"I have 25 years' experience in the public sector. During this time, I've noticed the lack of opportunities for people from CALD backgrounds to 'act-up' in roles and take on more responsibility. I have perceived a divide – non-CALD employees are given more opportunities to act up than others, creating a gap in experience. These small decisions make such a big difference in terms of people's career progression and advancement and the opportunities they get. There does not seem to be transparency for determining acting arrangements."

### Cultural barriers

"I'm working in a policy capacity and my team is encouraged to respectfully challenge authority. This is good, but it's also very intimidating. It's not natural to me – in my culture this is actively discouraged. You don't speak disrespectfully to elders, and this means not challenging authority in any way. I've grown up with this and so I find this challenging at work. My peers are climbing the ladder faster than me. I've struggled to make the same advantages because of my cultural context and the lack of understanding about it."



## Recognising overseas experience

Currently, overseas qualifications are not always recognised in recruitment processes. Focus group participants also perceive that experience gained overseas is not valued compared to local experience.



“It feels like **we have to start again**, one of the first things I did here was to do a Cert IV and I was just like I know this, but I needed another line in my CV to create momentum.”

“Local experience is valued a lot more highly – even if irrelevant. I have been working in my field for 15 years, but **that experience was not valued.**”

We note that the qualification requirements for particular roles are set independently, for example, for medical, legal and engineering roles. However, there is still perceived discrimination regarding overseas qualifications and experience where qualification requirements do not exist.

### Overseas experience

“I have 15 years of experience overseas, in both my home country of India and other countries. I also have four years of experience in Australia, but I feel that this is the only experience counted when trying to progress my government sector career – despite scale and magnitude of projects I’ve done overseas compared to the work I have done in Australia so far. I have obtained feedback on recent recruitment processes and have been told that I did not have enough years of experience.”



# Belonging and inclusion in the workplace

Workplaces that foster belonging and inclusion result in better employee experience and staff retention. Leaders and staff at all levels contribute to building government sector workplaces that are inclusive and supportive for all employees.

However, focus group participants expressed that they do not always experience workplace belonging due to persistent microaggressions and overt discrimination. Furthermore, they do not feel that there are safe pathways to raise complaints or grievances. Participants shared experiences of feeling ‘othered’ in workplace scenarios and of barriers to participating in workplace culture. On the other hand, they also reported feeling tokenised or pressured to be the only voice speaking up for issues relating to cultural diversity.

## Microaggressions and ‘everyday discrimination’



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“I feel like it’s assumed I cannot do something because of my background, for example, provide a presentation or lead a meeting. I will always have an accent, and my English may not sound ‘similar to yours’ **but that is not necessarily a weakness.**”

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“When I mention I’m from Australia, the question I still get is ‘**oh, where are you really from?**’ I can’t believe these comments still occur in the workplace.”

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“Once I get to know certain staff, there’ll be **certain jokes that have racial undertones.** I laugh it off, but I feel like I don’t belong.”

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“I have been told I am ‘lucky’ to be in this role in a group where the **other new leaders were not told this.**”

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“Casual racism is such an issue. There’s always this mentality that **if you’re not white, you’re ‘exotic’. You have to prove yourself to be Australian.**”

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“I am often told that my **name is too long to pronounce** and asked why I can’t have a shorter or ‘easier’ name.”

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## Feeling unsafe to raise complaints and grievances



“Even if there was a feedback or grievance pathway **it is very difficult to characterise or provide evidence for microaggressions** in the workplace, or unconscious bias (particularly when it’s for promotion or recruitment).”

“Often **HR is not a safe channel** to raise issues/barriers/concerns but is the only channel to do so.”

“I don’t feel that there are safe ways to report and raise issues without risking isolation, stopping career progression, or **being labelled a trouble-maker.**”

Focus group participants discussed how workplace belonging and inclusion are impacted because of barriers to ‘joining in’ in work culture. They also spoke about how their own cultural or religious needs, such as taking leave for important days, can often be overlooked.

### The cultural load of being the only CALD leader

“I feel that I’ve become the spokesperson for standing up against discrimination, rather than it being a collective responsibility across all of leadership. I am in a Public Sector Senior Executive role. It can be very lonely in meetings and workplace conversations. I often find myself having to speak up about diversity or call people out for their comments. I feel tokenised. I am exhausted. Non-CALD colleagues do not bring up issues around diversity, and instead always leave it to me. They look at me and say ‘you’re from an Indian background, diverse background, you can look after this, what is your opinion on this?’ ”

### Raising complaints

“I have experienced stereotyping and other forms of subtle racism. When I tried to share these experiences with my manager, they told me that I was ‘misinterpreting the situation’. I felt like my manager didn’t understand me because of their lack of understanding around racism and CALD peoples’ lived experience. I felt like I could not take my concerns further because if my direct manager does not understand racism then how will anybody else?”

## Everyday inclusion

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“Too many work events revolve around alcohol. This **excludes people who don’t drink for cultural and religious reasons.**”

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“Food and drink should always be considered before staff teas etc, so **the choices can be inclusive.**”

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“People like to go to after work drinks, and others of ethnic background might not drink as a cultural norm – a cultural practice. Even in discussions and socialising, like when people talk about what they do at the weekend, there’s a lack of cultural diversity. Some people might want to share more about the cultural practices they engage with outside of work, **but it doesn’t always feel safe.**”

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“The emphasis on Christmas and Easter is immediately exclusive. At the end of the year, everything just becomes about Christmas. Colleagues ask me what I’m doing for ‘Chrissy’ and I try to explain that I’m not doing anything because **it’s just not part of my life or my family’s culture.**”

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“When you raise CALD issues (e.g. a prayer room) to a white person in HR, **it goes nowhere.**”

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## Religious and cultural leave

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“I need to know my requests for leave to observe religious or cultural events or significant days will be **respected.**”

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“I need to talk about the impact of fast days on my work. I am worried that fasting will mean I fall behind in my tasks, but **I don’t feel safe to discuss this fully with my manager.**”

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“I’m Muslim. **I’ve had to work on Eid a number of times over the years.** It’s a huge celebration for my religion.”

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“I am sick of using my annual leave and flex days for cultural reasons when **other colleagues can just take time off to rest.** If we are such a diverse nation, why are Christmas and Easter the only times people get days off for a religious purpose?”

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# The impact of the lack of representation in the senior executive cohort

A recurring theme for focus group participants was how the lack of diversity at the senior executive level impacts belonging and inclusion across the sector. Not having a representative senior executive cohort can also be a barrier for employees hoping to progress their careers in the government sector. They cannot see themselves and their career pathways reflected, which can lead to a sense of a ‘glass-cultural ceiling’.<sup>7</sup>



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“Lack of cultural diversity in senior leadership makes **it harder to speak about cultural practices.**”

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“Lack of representation in senior leadership roles means **I can’t see myself represented,** so I don’t naturally think I can be a leader.”

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7 Diversity Council Australia (O’Leary, J., Groutsis, D. and D’Almada-Remedios, R.) *Cracking the Glass-Cultural Ceiling: Future Proofing Your Business in the 21st Century*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2017.

There is a sense that being a senior leader requires changing behaviour to ‘fit in’ with what is perceived as the dominant or ‘correct’ leadership style.



“There is a challenge to blend into a ‘Western’ dominant workforce and be more extroverted, but **leadership is different** depending on what you have grown up with.”

“Migrants are seen as not having the **right leadership style.**”

“Underrepresentation in senior leadership means that there is a **lack of respect for the ways that people from diverse backgrounds lead.** I also feel that CALD people have to ‘act white’ to get higher roles.”

Focus group participants shared that increasing cultural diversity in leadership can be one of the most impactful ways to ensure ongoing opportunities for CALD people to progress their careers.



“**Mentorship from CALD managers has been the only way for me to progress my career.** Other mentors I’ve had have treated me like a ‘project to be fixed’, or have been nice, but with no actual support and follow through.”

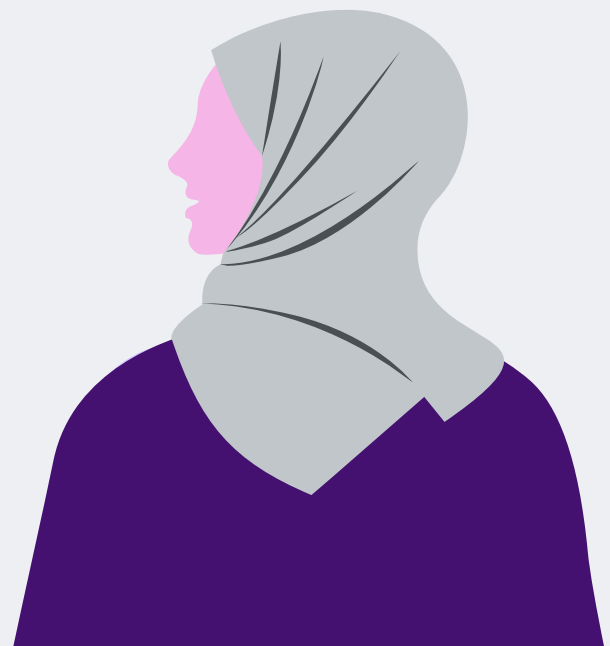
“A huge barrier has been **not having enough mentors with similar background and experience** who can empathise and provide guidance – particularly for promotions.”

## Representation in leadership

“I hold a Director-level role in a corporate setting in the government sector.

I have observed that the low representation of people from CALD backgrounds in our existing senior executives means that panels or recruiters are predominantly made up of people from non-CALD backgrounds. This leads to panels recruiting ‘themselves’ – recruiting people that are from similar backgrounds.

Those of us from a CALD background who are current senior leaders have an opportunity to create change. In my experience, CALD senior leaders are able to do things differently, make sure we are being culturally competent in the way we engage with our staff, and ensure that we are recruiting diverse teams.”



# Part 2

# Our action plan



# Framework for increasing cultural diversity in the senior executive cohort

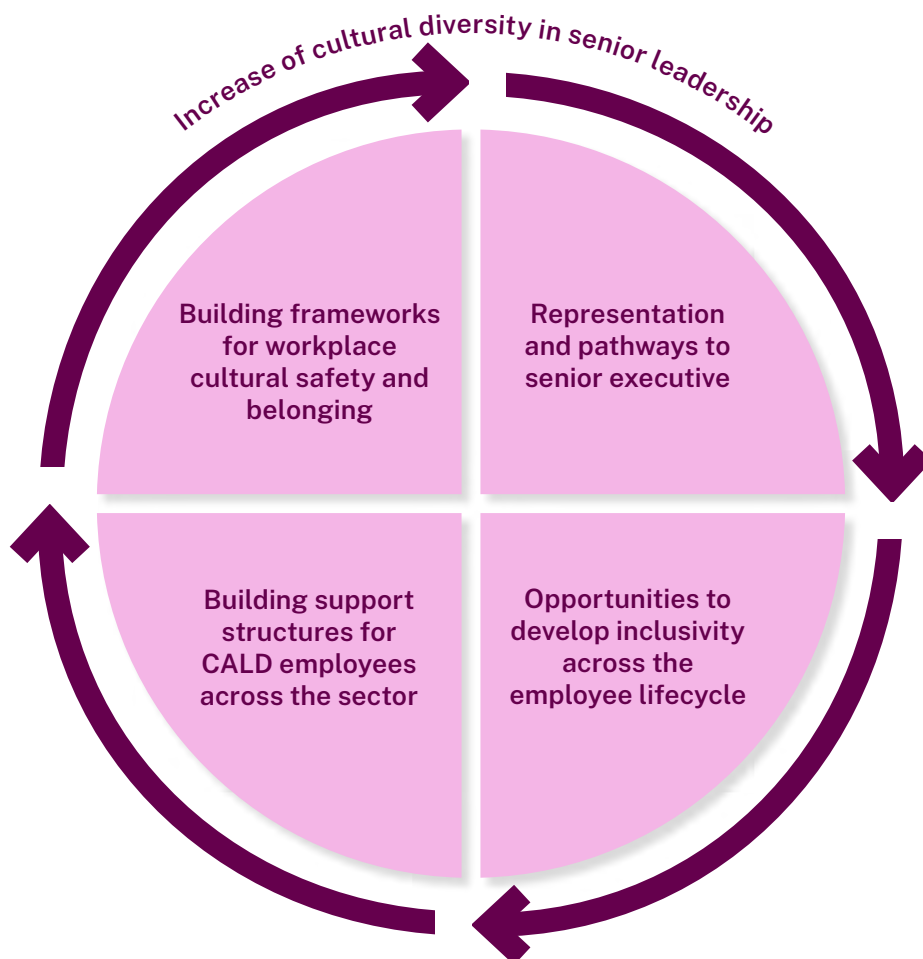
Following the consultations with CALD staff across the sector, the PSC has developed a framework for increasing cultural diversity in the NSW government sector senior executive cohort.

The framework incorporates four key areas which work together as a model for change.

The framework is circular, reflecting that representation is a cyclical process – if more employees who identify as CALD are in senior executive positions, this will lead to an increase of culturally diverse employees in senior roles.

Increasing cultural diversity in the senior executive cohort is not just about creating pathways to promotion, but about ensuring workplaces are culturally safe, improving belonging and challenging bias. While setting a target for CALD employees in senior roles can be beneficial, the relationship between employee experience and representation is key to ensuring workplace cultural safety and employee retention. The circular framework also represents this holistic approach.

We are developing projects and actions that fall into the four areas of the framework:







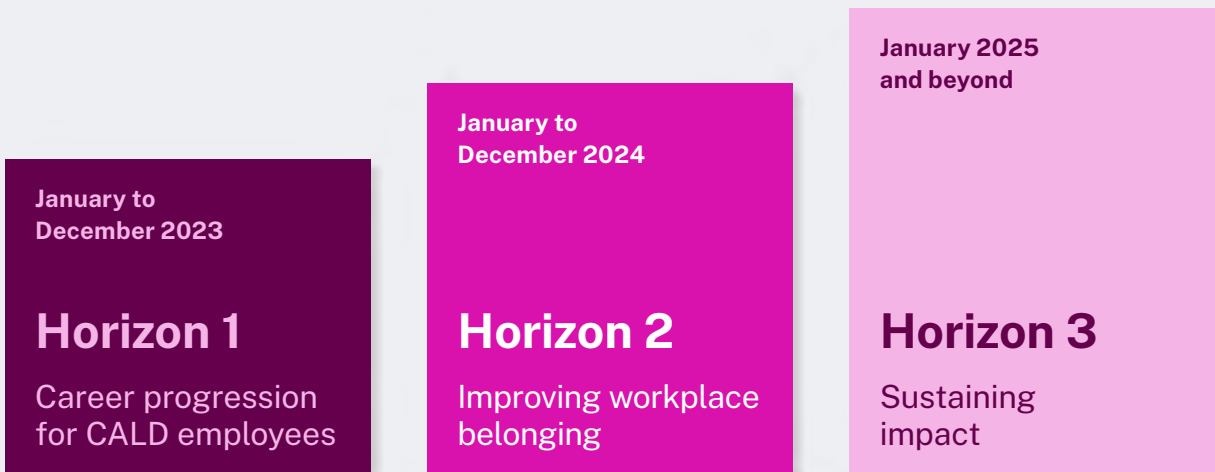
- 1.** **Representation and pathways to the senior executive level:** Ensuring that we are building pathways for increasing cultural diversity in the senior executive cohort.
- 2.** **Opportunities to develop inclusivity across the employee lifecycle:** Ensuring that we are responding to sector consultation feedback relating to structural bias across the lifecycle, for example, the need for more inclusive recruitment and more supportive pathways for reporting racism and making complaints.
- 3.** **Building support structures for CALD employees across the sector:** Harnessing our existing relationships with CALD ERGs and D&I leads across the sector to ensure CALD employees feel supported, respected, and can connect with employees who have similar lived experiences.
- 4.** **Building frameworks for workplace cultural safety and belonging:** We cannot build pathways for CALD employees to progress to the senior executive level without ensuring that workplaces have strong cultural safety and belonging. We will work with partners across the sector to ensure our Belonging and Inclusion Strategy can have everyday impact, and that CALD staff do not feel excluded in the workplace at any level.

It is important to note that this consultation and program of work is occurring in a broader context. Agencies within the NSW government sector have mentorship programs and other initiatives to support career progression for CALD employees. Training is available to enable sector employees to challenge their biases and to learn about diversity and inclusion.

CALD employees have developed ERGs and networks in multiple agencies. These groups and networks offer support and advocacy, and often work in partnership with D&I staff. We also recognise the achievements of current NSW government sector executives from CALD backgrounds who have broken the glass-cultural ceiling and continue to support their CALD colleagues as role models and mentors.

# Framework horizons

We will bring the framework to life through a series of projects across three horizons. These horizons will ensure momentum for our work. Our horizons will move through three key stages as we build increased pathways for career progression for CALD employees, improve workplace belonging and cultural safety, and ensure the sustainability of our project outcomes.



## Working principles

We will ensure that the project principles outlined below are embedded in our ways of working. These principles have been developed based on feedback from CALD staff during consultations.

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**Intersectionality:** We recognise the many facets that create identity. There cannot be a ‘one-size fits all’ approach to building projects for and with CALD employees. We will continue to make space for consultation, feedback and lived experience to ensure program accessibility.

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**Trauma-informed practice:** Engaging in work on CALD experience can be triggering for employees, especially for people who have experienced workplace racism. We will take a trauma-informed approach to building projects.

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**Sector co-design:** Sector co-design is vital to building effective projects and securing sector buy-in. In developing projects to support CALD inclusion in sector workplaces, and to increase cultural diversity across the senior executive cohort, we will leverage our relationships across CALD ERGs and D&I leads in agencies, and continue to convene focus groups.

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**Acknowledging the varied workplaces across the sector:** The NSW public sector incorporates a wide variety of work environments, including frontline services and office-based roles. We will ensure our projects can be adapted to support employees across the sector and the multiple contexts they work in.

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## Key achievements in 2022

We improved the way we collect data on CALD employees in the 2022 PMES. A review of the 2021 PMES survey questions showed that country of birth does not adequately capture cultural diversity. For example, someone may have been born in a country while growing up in a different country, leading to them not identifying with their birth country.

Diversity Council Australia's Counting Culture report (2021) recommends that cultural diversity be measured in a holistic way which recognises that cultural diversity has multiple aspects. While several measures are suggested, the report identifies cultural background as the most meaningful and important measure which incorporates ethnicity, ancestry and cultural identity. The report also emphasises the importance of allowing people to select multiple cultural backgrounds, which is supported by research showing that between 30-70% of Australian workers identify with more than one cultural background.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the 2022 PMES included a new question asking respondents to identify up to two cultural backgrounds that they identify with. The question used the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups that enables benchmarking against ABS data on the NSW population.

We have also established strong relationships with CALD ERG leads across the sector and are facilitating connections between the groups, paving the way for Horizon 1 and 2.



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8 *DCA Counting Culture, 2021*

# Horizon 1

## Career progression for CALD employees

January to December 2023

Horizon 1 will see the commencement of ‘Elevate & Advocate’, a new sponsorship program from the PSC designed to directly support CALD employees with their career progression. Alongside this key program, we will develop capability uplift events for current senior executive leaders and collaborate with the sector’s network of CALD ERGs.



### ‘Elevate & Advocate’ – Sponsorship program for CALD employees

We are delivering a new sponsorship program for CALD employees across the sector.

Sponsorship programs ensure a more direct impact on career progression. Whereas a mentor might offer advice, a sponsor takes an active role in building pathways for a sponsee and supporting greater momentum for their career progression.

Our sponsorship program sees CALD employees sponsored by government sector senior executives. These relationships will be set up for mutual learning. Sponsors will be guided to learn about allyship, advocacy and challenging their own biases.

The program is:

- Supporting CALD employees to progress towards senior executive roles
- Creating greater understanding of the barriers faced by CALD employees in their career progression
- Enabling cross-sector responsibility for supporting CALD employees’ career progression
- Ensuring capability uplift in relation to structural and personal bias and different leadership styles
- Incorporating sustainability into its set up to enable the PSC to continue delivering to other inclusion areas



“You need a sponsor who backs up your capability and your competence to help overcome career progression hurdles. I think that is key – more leaders in those positions who are able to cultivate the next crop of leaders and **start to change the perception that we as CALD people can’t become senior leaders.**”

“It would be so beneficial to be able to talk to senior leaders and **to feel heard and valued** – to explain what’s happening, and why our cultural backgrounds might mean we talk differently or act differently as leaders – but that doesn’t make us less capable.”



## Connection events and capability uplift for senior executives

The PSC will bring together a panel of respected thought leaders in diversity, inclusion and anti-racism for executive learning and development events.

This will include exploring the theme of **‘There is no one way to be a leader’** to expand notions of leadership archetypes and honour diverse leadership styles.

These initiatives will support current government sector senior executives to take collective responsibility for increasing cultural diversity at a senior executive level.



## Supporting CALD ERGs and networks across the sector

The PSC will expand support to the CALD ERGs and networks across the sector. We will support ERG Chairs to come together to share resources through our [Belonging and Inclusion Library](#) and explore the potential to build a community of practice.

The value of ERGs was discussed frequently during sector consultations:



“Sometimes it is frustrating when you’re just one person in that entire hospital or group of colleagues, and then you need to prove yourself all the time. **It’s so good to connect with other CALD staff.**”

“I met someone who speaks the same language as me through a cross-sector meeting. I was so excited. We kept in touch just so we can talk in our mother tongue, which **feels so affirming.**”





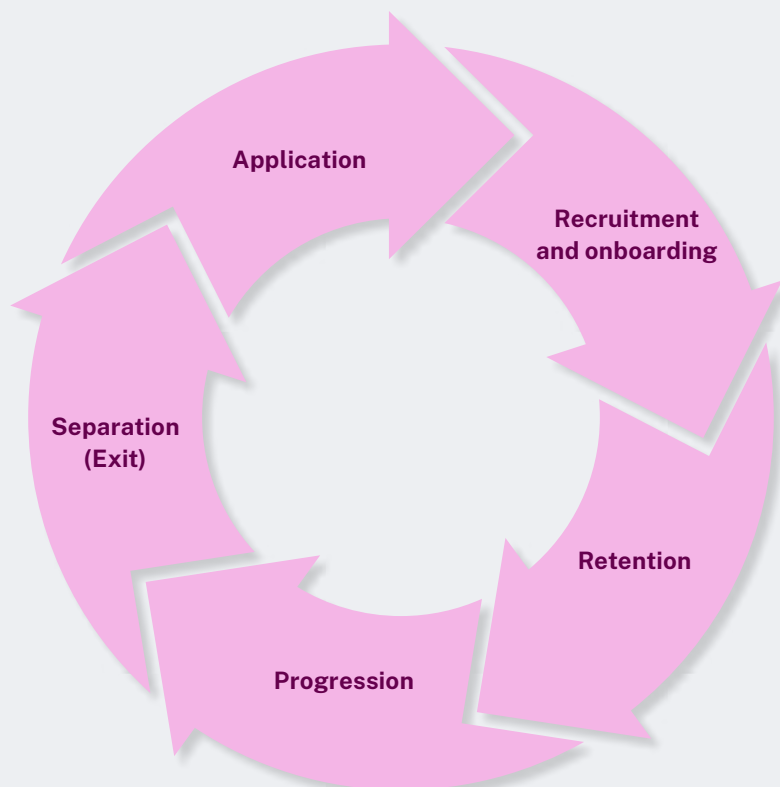
## Employee lifecycle opportunities

The employee lifecycle maps out the stages an employee progresses through during their time with an organisation. Focus group participants referenced specific points in the employee lifecycle where bias, racism and stereotyping impacted their experience. There was a strong emphasis on **application, recruitment and progression**, and how a lack of belonging and inclusion impacts **retention**.

The PSC is exploring opportunities to support CALD employees across the employee lifecycle during Horizon 1, continuing into Horizon 2. This includes:

- Collaborating with agencies across the NSW public sector who are building resources to support inclusivity across the employee lifecycle for CALD employees
- Exploring processes and workplace supports to enable employees to better observe important days of cultural and religious significance
- Sharing how NSW government sector agencies are creating processes for recognising overseas experience
- Identifying opportunities to enable recruitment resources to be accessed in multiple languages. While applications for government sector roles need to be completed in English, being able to read recruitment resources in other languages can support applicants from non-English speaking backgrounds to obtain a greater understanding of government sector work.

### The employee lifecycle



# Horizon 2

## Improving workplace belonging

January to December 2024

Horizon 2 builds on Horizon 1 to foster greater workplace belonging and cultural safety. This will ensure that workplace culture remains inclusive for CALD staff as they progress through their careers. Horizon 2 aims to expand awareness of the barriers faced by CALD staff and ensure collective responsibility across the sector for tackling structural and everyday bias and discrimination. Horizon 2 projects include:



### Employee lifecycle – opportunities for collaboration

We will continue moving towards outcomes for opportunities explored during Horizon 1. We will work closely with colleagues across the PSC to ensure there is clear guidance for overall inclusivity across the employee lifecycle. We will collaborate with other sector agencies who are developing guidance on themes such as inclusive recruitment and workplace belonging. We will ensure all resources can be accessible and supportive for the entire sector.



### A hearts and minds campaign

This will profile current government sector senior executives who are from CALD backgrounds, who will share their stories of lived experience and their career journeys. They will provide inspiration and advice for other CALD staff and be positioned as role models for the sector, enabling other CALD employees to feel they can have a pathway to government sector senior executive levels. The campaign will also increase awareness of the bias experienced by CALD employees and inspire calls to action for structural change. It will be rolled out across the sector through physical and digital resources, and the Belonging & Inclusion Library.



### ‘Everyday inclusion’ projects

The PSC will explore strategies to increase ‘everyday belonging’ and help address microaggressions in the workplace.



### Ongoing support for CALD ERGs and networks

Building on achievements and projects from Horizon 1.

# Horizon 3

## Sustaining impact

January 2025 and beyond

Horizon 3 focuses on sustaining impact. We will continue to work on increasing CALD representation in the senior executive cohort and to look for ongoing opportunities to improve employee experience.



### Ongoing support of CALD ERGs and networks

We will ensure ongoing support of CALD ERGs and networks.



### Measuring impact

We will measure the ongoing impact of the hearts and minds campaign, refreshing the campaign if needed.



### Ongoing sharing of resources and case studies

We will ensure that resources developed through this program of work are shared through PSC channels and the Belonging and Inclusion Library.

We note that additional projects may continue to be identified and developed, and planned projects may continue beyond across Horizon 3.



## Collective responsibility for inclusion

The PSC is committed to designing and delivering projects and initiatives that will help increase cultural diversity in the senior executive cohort. However, the sector as a whole has a collective responsibility for ensuring greater impact and outcomes.

The PSC's CALD program of work connects with other work we are doing, including our:

- Belonging & Inclusion Strategy
- Inclusion Forums
- Anti-Racism program of work
- Intersectional inclusion initiatives.

Across the sector, we will support senior executives to set the tone for increasing inclusion and career progression pathways for CALD employees. We will collaborate with ERGs, People & Culture Leads and Diversity & Inclusion Leads to share resources and to bring projects to life.



# Appendices



# Appendix 1: Focus group consultation process



Focus groups held



Focus group participants



Follow-up surveys completed  
by focus group participants

## Focus groups overview

During June and July 2022, the PSC undertook consultations with CALD employees across the government sector to discuss barriers and opportunities for CALD employees in their career progression. Initially, four focus groups were planned, each with a capacity of up to 15 people. Due to overwhelming demand, additional focus groups were added. In total, 11 focus groups were held with 109 employees participating. Focus groups were mostly held virtually via Microsoft Teams.

The focus groups also included the following specific sessions:

- two in-person focus groups with Northern Sydney Local Health District staff
- two focus groups with Graduate Program participants and young professionals.

The focus groups enabled participants to discuss and share:

- barriers/challenges and opportunities for their success in the sector
- racism and discrimination they may have experienced in their public sector careers
- what could make the sector a more inclusive place to work.

Focus groups were designed for open discussion through:

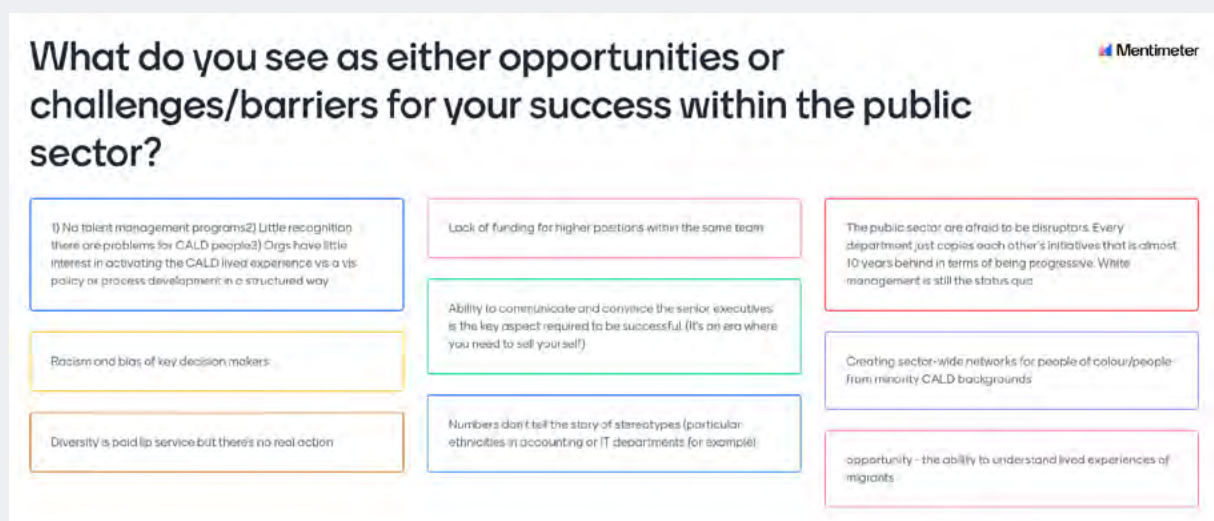
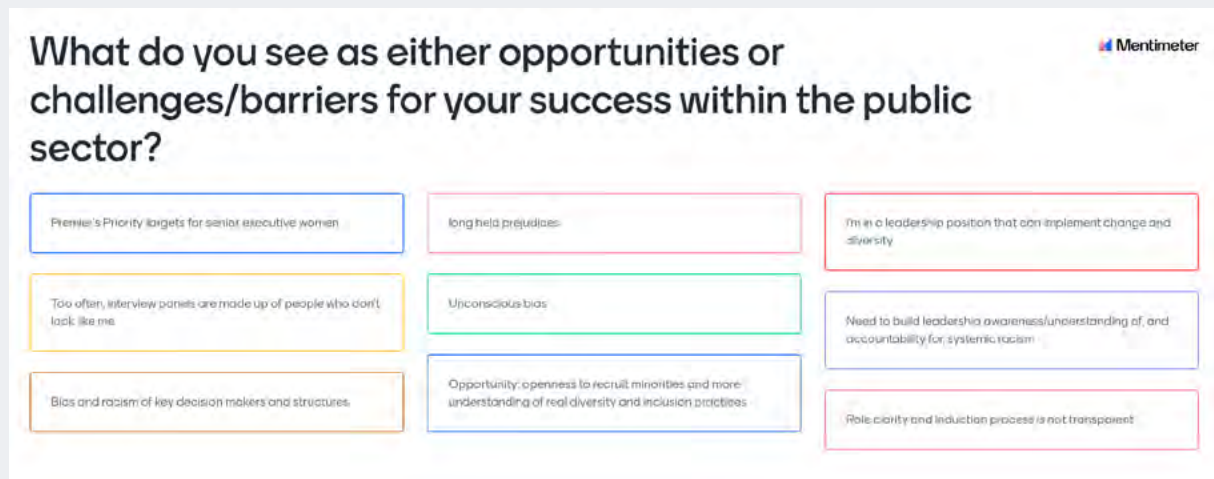
- initial context setting, enabling participants to understand more about the proposal endorsed by the NSW Secretaries Board and the objectives of the focus groups
- group introductions, enabling facilitators and participants to introduce themselves with information they could choose to share (participants did not have to state their role and agency)
- the use of 'Mentimeter', an online tool enabling all participants to respond to the same questions in real time. This meant everyone could share their thoughts and ideas without the pressure of needing to speak up in the group unless they chose to
- facilitated open ended discussions – participants were invited to share additional thoughts, stories or context in relation to their own or others' responses.

# Appendix 2: Focus group consultation results

## Mentimeter

The Mentimeter asked participants ‘What do you see as either opportunities or challenges/barriers for your success within the Public Sector?’<sup>9</sup> The Mentimeter responses were then used by facilitators to guide subsequent discussions, unpacking comments and exploring emerging themes.

## Mentimeter responses



9 The terms ‘public sector’ and ‘senior leader’ were in used in focus groups to guide discussions. However, participants used ‘senior leader’ and ‘senior executives’ interchangeably, as well as ‘public sector’ and ‘government sector’ so throughout this report we have preserved the terms participants used.

### What do you see as either opportunities or challenges/barriers for your success within the public sector?

Mentimeter

Racism	Lack of consideration or acknowledgement of experience and education from country of birth	Understanding political environment/issues as its not something I grew up with
Racism in recruitment processes	Being the only POC in my team	Lack of Diversity on recruitment panels
opp: push to meet quotas and increase rep, barriers: racism	Networks and who you know, particularly at the senior leadership levels	Lack of representation in senior leadership roles - can't see myself represented so don't naturally think I can be a leader

### What do you see as either opportunities or challenges/barriers for your success within the public sector?

Mentimeter

Inaccessible resources and support for those who don't have english as a first language	Few visible role models	Opportunities to 'oot up' to showcase and develop skills and experience to be promoted
Lack of cohesive approaches to combating discrimination	Networking and communication	Push for diversity in leadership
Mental wellbeing from having to experience constant racism	Casual racism	Continuously hearing CALD employees, particularly migrants, are to be grateful for the casual employment opportunities - even if overqualified

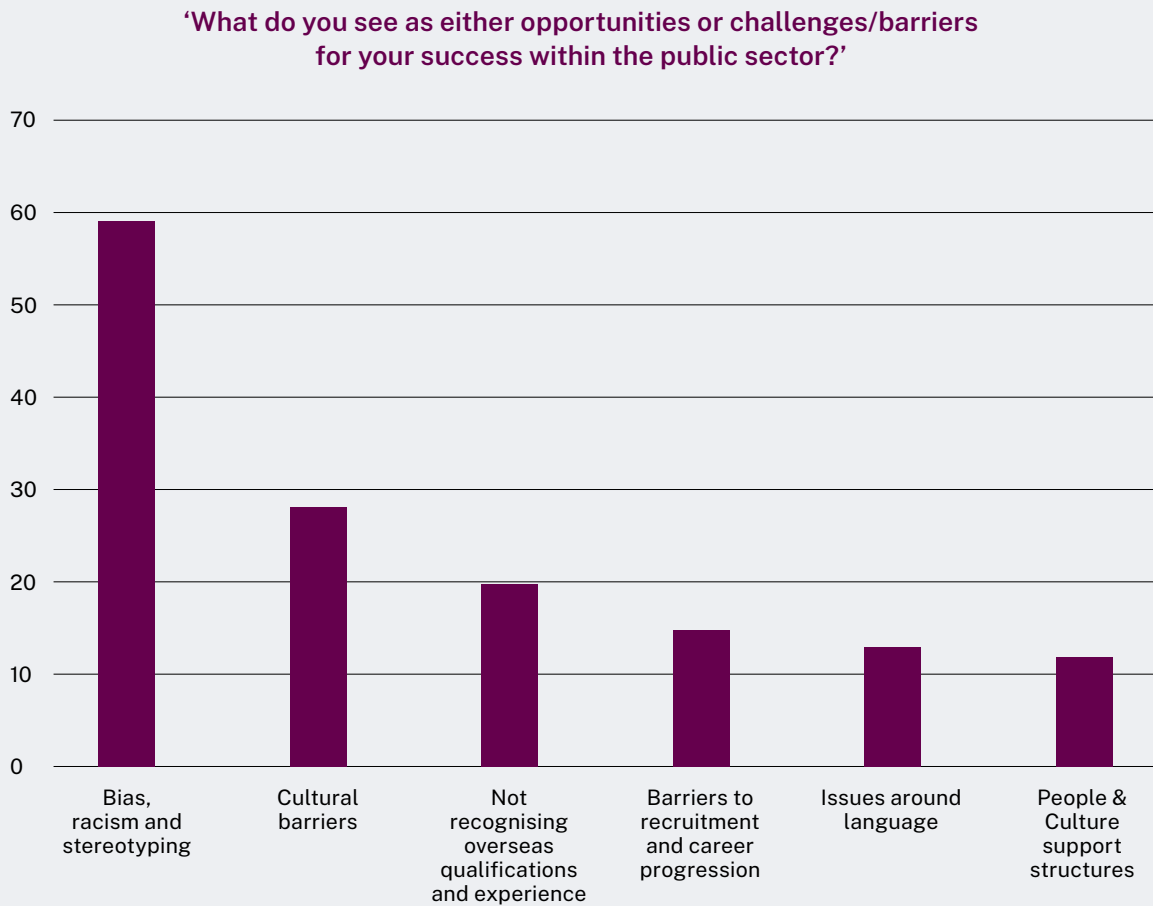
### What do you see as either opportunities or challenges/barriers for your success within the public sector?

Mentimeter

Cultural diversity is Not a premier's priority	diversity and inclusion teams sometimes don't know how to approach cald	Senior leaders not taking me seriously because of my race and gender
Lack of diversity in senior leadership to be role models for younger CALD staff	Recruitment processes allow for bias and racism	Networking with 'right people' and having similar interests (eg. politics, hard to connect if not from similar upbringing)
Local experience is valued more over international experience	Feeling stuck in entry level or frontline roles because of my race	Opportunities - public service makeup is becoming much more diverse. Need leaders who can work with diversity

## Breaking down Mentimeter response trends

Mentimeter responses from all 11 focus groups have been analysed and coded to pull together trends. Participants were able to input multiple responses so this is not a 1:1 match.



### Bias, racism and stereotyping

The most common Mentimeter response during every focus group related to bias, racism and stereotyping. Many focus group participants shared these exact words as their key challenge or barrier to career progression.

Other comments broke this down further, including:

- bias from senior executives and from managers
- structural racism within workplace processes

## Cultural barriers

This trend encompassed employees feeling:

- excluded from perceived 'Australian workplace culture'
- a lack of cultural belonging due to their cultural background

## Not recognising overseas qualifications and experience

This was cited multiple times during the focus groups, and was a particular focus during the Northern Sydney Local Health District sessions. It included:

- employees working in roles they were overqualified for, given their overseas qualifications
- employees finding progression difficult, given that their overseas experience was discounted compared to local experience

## Lack of CALD representation in the senior executive cohort

Both the workforce profile data and the PSC paper submitted to the NSW Secretaries Board highlighted the need to increase diversity at the senior executive level. This was reflected during focus group discussions, with many participants commenting that "I can't be what I can't see".

## Recruitment and career progression

Issues with recruitment were discussed in every focus group, with participants commenting on:

- the inaccessibility of the process and the need for diverse representation on panels
- career progression being impacted by bias and systemic racism
- barriers such as a lack of opportunity for promotion based on merit, lack of understanding of lived experience, and lack of diversity in the department/agency

## Issues around language

Language bias and perceptions around employees' English skills were cited as a barrier within the recruitment process. There were also comments about how language and accents impact day-to-day working.

## People & Culture support structures

Focus group participants felt that People & Culture support structures were often not accessible, in areas including:

- complaints and grievance pathways
- diversity and inclusion strategies.

# Appendix 3: Follow-up survey

The PSC shared an optional, anonymous follow-up survey with all focus group participants. The survey gave participants an opportunity to share additional thoughts on their experiences as CALD employees in the NSW government sector. The PSC received 24 responses, with respondents from nine different clusters across the sector.

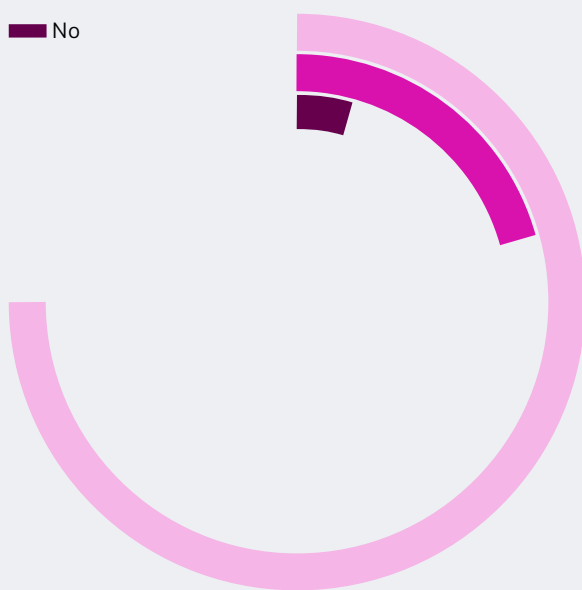
The survey included the following open ended prompts:

- How do you feel that your cultural, racial or ethnic identity has affected your experience as a NSW public sector employee?
- Describe any opportunities or barriers to career progression within your workplace
- What strategies or approaches do you think can help dismantle these barriers or challenges?
- Describe actions or strategies you would like to see more of from your workplace, managers or leaders to tackle workplace racism and in shaping a NSW public sector where racial equity is prioritised

The survey also included closed questions:

**Do you think racism is an issue in your workplace, whether through your own experiences or those of others?**

- Yes
- Unsure
- No



**Is your workplace proactively trying to prevent, or take actions to respond to workplace racism?**

- No
- Unsure
- Yes







# Increasing cultural diversity in the NSW government sector senior executive cohort

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