



Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia

## **POSITION STATEMENT: EQUITY BY DESIGN & PRIORITY ACTION**

### **Statement of Purpose**

As the peak body representing multicultural communities across South Australia, the Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia (MCCSA) advocates for a stronger, more consistent approach to how governments and service providers engage with our diverse population.

South Australia's diversity is one of its greatest strengths. To realise this potential, systems and services must be designed from the outset to meet the needs of all communities. While progress has been made, these approaches are not yet applied consistently, and opportunities remain to improve outcomes.

When multicultural communities are not considered early in policy and service design, systems can become less effective, leading to exclusion, inefficiencies, and higher long-term costs.

MCCSA calls on the South Australian Government to adopt Equity by Design as a whole-of-government standard, to be operationalised through Priority Action.

Our vision is for a South Australia where systems are designed to serve everyone from the beginning, with resources focused on removing barriers rather than labelling groups of people.

### **The Case for Equity by Design**

Equity must be embedded across all government systems, policies, and investments, from the beginning.

- **Design inclusively:** Accessibility and inclusion must be built into the design phase of all public services, including healthcare, transport, and digital systems. Fixing systems after they are built is expensive and often leaves people behind.
- **Maximise benefit:** Designing for those experiencing the greatest barriers, including linguistic and digital challenges, benefits everyone. Inclusive design improves usability, efficiency, and the reach of services across the population.
- **Ensure accountability:** Mandatory accountability measures are essential. All policy, funding, and procurement decisions should demonstrate how they meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities prior to implementation.

If equity is not built in from the start, systems risk excluding people, reducing efficiency and incurring higher long-term costs.

## From "Priority Populations" to "Priority Action"

Policies and services must shift from labelling populations to addressing the structural drivers of disadvantage.

- **Reframe the problem:** Policy should move away from deficit-based labels such as “vulnerable” or “priority populations,” which can obscure the underlying causes of exclusion. The focus must be on removing barriers, including language access, recognition of overseas qualifications, and systemic discrimination. Barriers exist because of how systems are designed, not the people navigating them, so solutions must directly target these structural challenges.
- **Commit to proportionate universalism:** All South Australians should have access to a universal baseline of high-quality services. Effort and investment should be scaled according to demonstrated need, guided by robust data and evidence. The objective must be to close outcome gaps, not categorise people.
- **Invest efficiently:** A shift from short-term, fragmented funding to sustained, outcomes-driven investment is essential. This approach addresses root causes, reduces the long-term risk of service failure, and delivers measurable system-wide change.

If systems are not designed to address structural barriers, the burden falls on individuals, leading to exclusion, uneven access, and greater gaps in outcomes.

## The Role of Community-Led Organisations

While the State is responsible for building an equitable system, organisations like MCCSA and its members remain an essential bridge between government and communities.

- **Authoritative expertise:** Community-led organisations provide sector-leading advice grounded in lived experience, cultural knowledge, and direct community engagement. This expertise is vital for the successful implementation of Equity by Design and helps reduce the risk of failure.
- **Trusted system interface:** Acting as established intermediaries, community-led organisations provide a critical link between government and the public, fostering the trust required for effective engagement, communication, and service uptake.

## Recommendations for Government and Partners

1. **Adopt Equity by Design across government:** Embed cultural and linguistic accessibility as a mandatory requirement across all government-funded services, infrastructure, and procurement processes, supported by appropriate accountability mechanisms.
2. **Reform funding models:** Transition from short-term, population-based grants to long-term, partnership-based investment models that enable sustained action on structural barriers.
3. **Improve data, transparency, and accountability:** Implement consistent and transparent data collection and reporting to identify outcome gaps and direct targeted, evidence-based action.

## **Conclusion**

South Australia must move beyond reactive, fragmented approaches and build systems that are inclusive by design. MCCSA will continue to lead and collaborate with government to embed Equity by Design and drive Priority Action, ensuring services are accessible, effective, and responsive to all communities. By focusing on removing barriers rather than labelling people, and by scaling support according to need, the state can achieve fairer outcomes, stronger social cohesion, and a more productive society where no one is left behind.