

# **Submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion**

May 2026

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## Acknowledgement of Country

SSI acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians and Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work. We pay respect to Elders past and present and recognise their continuous connection to Country.

## Background

SSI welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion.

SSI is a national non-for-profit organisation that delivers a range of human services that connect individuals, families, and children from diverse backgrounds with opportunities – including settlement support, disability inclusion programs, community engagement initiatives and training and employment pathways. At the heart of everything we do is a drive for equality, empathy, and celebration of every individual.

SSI was founded in Sydney in 2000 with the aim of helping newly arrived refugees settle in Australia. Over time, our expertise in working with people from diverse cultural and linguistic (CALD) backgrounds served as the foundation for a gradual expansion into other social services and geographical areas, including Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia.

In 2024-25, SSI supported over 53,000 people across almost 60 programs and community-based services nationally. We are also a leading provider of evidence-based insights into the social sector and are known as an organisation that can reach communities that are considered 'hard to reach'.

SSI delivers a range of community programs that engage and empower community members, foster collaboration, improve service navigation, and promote positive change across the communities we serve. These types of programs include a range of place-based initiatives, such as youth, women and seniors' programs, and our arts, culture, sports, and community engagement programs.

Drawing on this expertise and experience, this submission details for the Royal Commission's consideration opportunities for all Australian governments to respond to antisemitism; and best practice de-radicalisation and social cohesion approaches. Recommendations are made that are intended to advance those approaches.

# Summary of SSI Recommendations

The Royal Commission is asked to consider the following recommendations detailed in the 5 pillars to strengthen social cohesion.

Pillar	Recommendation
<b>1: National leadership on social cohesion and collective belonging</b>	1.1: Make social cohesion a standing item on the National Cabinet agenda
	1.2: Establish a national social cohesion framework with shared goals, indicators and accountability
<b>2: Centre community voice and rebuild trust</b>	2.1: All jurisdictions to facilitate locally led listening roundtables with diaspora, faith and community groups
	2.2: Establish a Social Cohesion Advisory Council to the Prime Minister
	2.3: Remove Harmony Day branding and directly mark the significance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
<b>3: Strengthen cultural responsiveness of government and essential services, and the Australian public</b>	3.1: Governments should invest in evidence-based bystander intervention and anti-racism training
	3.2: Mandate and resource cultural and religious responsiveness training
	3.3: Improve hate crime data transparency
<b>4: Enhance community safety and participation</b>	4.1: Establish a Community Safety Fund
	4.2: Establish a Community Participation Fund
<b>5: Whole of society, prevention-led response</b>	5.1: Fully implement the Multicultural Framework Review and the National Anti-Racism Framework
	5.2: Strengthen the social infrastructure that enables belonging
	5.3: Strengthen anti-racism education in schools
	5.4: Introduce a positive duty in the Racial Discrimination Act
	5.5: Broaden economic participation and improve social mobility

# Response to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

## Australia's social cohesion is being tested

The December 2025 antisemitic terror attack at Bondi Beach – the worst act of terrorism in Australia's modern history – was a devastating and horrific act of hateful violence targeting the Jewish community at a time that should have been marked by light, hope and togetherness. SSI's solidarity with the Jewish community is unwavering and we recognise that the safety of any one group is inseparable from the wellbeing of all.

Antisemitism should have no place in Australia. It is profoundly shocking that a community for whom Australia has meant a place of safety and hope over generations should experience such senseless violence. Antisemitism is a scourge that corrodes the values of dignity, equality and mutual respect on which a cohesive society depends. Jewish Australians should be able to practise their faith, express their identity, gather in community and live their daily lives free from fear, discrimination, harassment and violence. When Jewish people feel unsafe, it is a warning sign for the health of our wider society.

Violence and toxic hate have spread further since the Bondi Beach antisemitic attack, with significant flow-on effects for the Jewish community as well as Muslim communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, African Australians, Asian Australians and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities. A timeline of events since December 2025 reveals a disturbing pattern of increasing hate-motivated violence affecting multiple minority communities. In the two weeks after the antisemitic terror attack, there was a 740 per cent increase in Islamophobic incidents. Within a six-week period, Lakemba Mosque received four threats of violence. In January 2026, a failed pipe bomb attack, later recognised as a terrorist act, targeted First Nations leaders and allies at an Invasion Day rally in Perth. In February 2026, a planned terrorism plot targeting mosques in Western Australia was uncovered, allegedly motivated by white supremacist ideology. Taken together, the Bondi Beach attack and these incidents point to a disturbing pattern of violence, hate and social division directed at multiple minority communities.

Responding quickly to serious incidents is essential, but it is not enough on its own. Government action must extend beyond crisis response and to sustained systemic reform. Durable change requires addressing the structural conditions that allow racism, misinformation and dehumanising narratives to take root and spread, and this would increase the safety of all communities.

## Redefine social cohesion

This Royal Commission presents a major opportunity to clearly define what social cohesion means in the Australian context. Such a definition should reflect the kind of Australia people expect to live in – where everyone is treated fairly, feels like they belong and have a genuine opportunity to freely and fully participate in economic, civic and cultural life. It should also avoid definitions that include “assimilation” or a narrow focus on security which undermine true social cohesion. The language we use shapes the solutions we can imagine.

In developing a holistic vision for social cohesion, SSI urges the Royal Commission to draw on the experiences of the community services sector, including settlement and multicultural organisations. These organisations work closely with communities every day and can give practical insight into what enables people to feel included and connected. As outlined in the

attached thought piece on Social Cohesion for a Multicultural Australia: Building a Nation Together, we encourage the Royal Commission to consider social cohesion as a living, dynamic process of nation-building — one in which difference is a creative resource, not a threat to be managed.

From SSI’s perspective social cohesion means collective belonging – a shared sense that everyone in society is recognised as part of the national story and has an equal stake in it, having the ability to fully participate in Australia economically, socially, civically and culturally. Social cohesion is the outcome, collective belonging is the goal, and equality and inclusion are the pathway. Responsibility should shift from individuals having to “fit in” to systems being redesigned to include.

A positive reimagining of social cohesion, however, is only one part of the picture. Social cohesion in Australia cannot be achieved without confronting racism and the systems that perpetuate it. Racism and structural inequality continue to shape people’s daily experiences in Australia and any serious effort to strengthen cohesion must address these underlying drivers of division.

As the Royal Commission develops recommendations to improve social cohesion, SSI recommends recognising that experiences of belonging and exclusion are shaped by overlapping systems of power and inequality, often resulting in multiple and compounding forms of disadvantage. Racism and marginalisation do not occur in isolation; they intersect with factors such as gender, migration status, sexuality and socio-economic inequality. Recognising and responding to these layered inequalities will be key to strengthening social cohesion and tackling antisemitism, racism and other forms of marginalisation.

### A holistic, prevention-led whole-of-society approach

The government is uniquely positioned to drive this change by role modelling inclusive leadership in how it talks about and responds to these issues. This starts with listening, especially to communities who feel excluded from decision-making and who believe their experiences of racism, hatred and violence are not taken seriously. Without meaningful access and intentional listening, people can feel disenfranchised which, in turn, leads to further tension and civil unrest. While the right to peacefully protest is a fundamental part of any democracy, it is incumbent on government to provide forums and mechanisms for communities to share their concerns with decision-makers. Rebuilding trust requires visible, consistent and principled leadership that affirms equal protection and equal concern for all.

The Australian Government has the opportunity to take a leadership role in strengthening social cohesion through a holistic, prevention focused whole-of-society approach. Cohesion requires more than tolerance; it requires genuine and transformative inclusion. People from all backgrounds must be able to participate fully in civic, economic and social life in Australia — with equitable access to meaningful work, education, health services, housing, justice and public decision-making.

# Recommendations

## Pillar 1: National leadership on social cohesion and collective belonging

Strong national leadership is essential to strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly diverse and fast-changing Australia. While many drivers of cohesion are experienced locally, the policy levers that shape trust, inclusion, safety and belonging sit across all levels of government. A more coordinated national approach would help align efforts, close gaps between jurisdictions, respond faster to emerging tensions, and establish a shared vision for a cohesive Australia.

- **Recommendation 1.1: Make social cohesion a standing item on the National Cabinet agenda** to coordinate national responses across jurisdictions to all forms of hate. A standing item would enable governments to share intelligence on emerging community tensions and hate incidents, align investment in education and community resilience programs, identify and scale best practice initiatives across jurisdictions and embed social cohesion considerations into housing, education, employment and justice policy.
- **Recommendation 1.2: Establish a national social cohesion framework with shared goals, indicators and accountability.** The framework should articulate a clear national vision, measurable outcomes, and common indicators that every state and territory work towards, while allowing flexibility for local delivery. The framework should measure progress across key domains such as trust in institutions, experiences of racism and hate, sense of belonging and inclusion, intergroup trust and social connection, and economic participation and opportunity.

## Pillar 2: Centre community voice and rebuild trust

A stronger national approach should embed ongoing dialogue, equitable access to decision-makers, and genuine partnership with communities. Trust grows when people feel heard, respected and able to shape the decisions that affect their lives. Listening must be continuous, not episodic.

- **Recommendation 2.1: All jurisdictions to facilitate locally led listening roundtables with diaspora, faith and community groups** to provide safe and moderated spaces where people can raise concerns, ask questions, and feel genuinely heard. They should be designed around ongoing trust- and relationship building rather than transactional consultation.
- **Recommendation 2.2: Establish a Social Cohesion Advisory Council to the Prime Minister** – a standing advisory body with representation from a range of faiths and diaspora groups who can raise issues affecting their communities directly with the Prime Minister. A mechanism like this would help ensure more equitable access to decision-makers, reduce the perception that some communities are heard more than others, and strengthen confidence that government listens to all Australians.
- **Recommendation 2.3: Remove Harmony Day branding and directly mark the significance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,** in

line with the day's original purpose and global significance. While celebration and inclusion matter, a mature multicultural society should also be willing to name and confront racism directly. Governments should support this shift by formally recognising 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, funding national education and awareness campaigns on racism and inclusion, and encouraging all parliamentarians to lead anti-racism initiatives in their electorates. This would send a clear message that belonging is strengthened not by avoiding difficult conversations, but by confronting exclusion and building respect.

### Pillar 3: Strengthen cultural responsiveness of government and essential services, and the Australian public

A cohesive society depends not only on laws and institutions, but on everyday interactions. People form their sense of belonging through encounters with schools, hospitals, police, transport systems, workplaces and public services. When these interactions are respectful, culturally responsive and fair, trust grows. When they are dismissive, discriminatory or uninformed, trust can quickly erode. Cultural capability should not be treated as optional training or symbolic compliance. It is core capability for effective service delivery, community safety and public confidence.

- **Recommendation 3.1: Governments should invest in evidence-based bystander intervention and anti-racism training** for frontline workers who regularly interact with the public, including teachers, youth workers, health workers, transport staff, and customer service officers to recognise and respond to all forms of hate. These workers are often the first witnesses to racism, harassment or hate incidents and can play a critical role in de-escalation, support and prevention.
- **Recommendation 3.2: Mandate and resource cultural and religious responsiveness training** for all police and security agencies. Embed evidence-based cultural and religious sensitivity training into induction, leadership development and ongoing professional learning across police, corrective services, border, intelligence and security agencies. This approach should be treated as core operational capability, similar to training on domestic, family and sexual violence, child protection or mental health response. Better capability within policing and security institutions would support faster, more trusted and more effective responses to hate incidents, including during periods of heightened geopolitical tension or local unrest.
- **Recommendation 3.3: Improve hate crime data transparency**, requiring all police services to gather data according to a national standard and for that data to be reported publicly. A national framework should require data to be disaggregated across relevant categories, including antisemitic incidents, Islamophobic incidents, anti-Arab racism, anti-Palestinian racism, anti-Asian racism, anti-Black racism, and anti-First Nations racism. This data could be used to inform policy responses and resource allocation and shine a light on hidden racism and social division.

## Pillar 4: Enhance community safety and participation

Social cohesion depends on two things being true at the same time: people must feel safe, and they must feel they belong. Safety enables participation. Participation builds relationships, trust and shared identity. A strong national approach should therefore invest both in protecting communities at risk and in creating more opportunities for people to meet, contribute and build trust at the local level.

- **Recommendation 4.1: Establish a Community Safety Fund** for communities facing heightened hate-related risks. This support should extend to all faith-based and ethno-specific organisations facing elevated risks of racially or religiously motivated safety harm, harassment or intimidation. Eligible funding should cover physical security upgrades, safety planning and risk assessments, cyber and digital security, staff and volunteer training in emergency preparedness and incident response, crisis communications and security coordination for major events. Allocation should be risk-based and available to all communities experiencing credible threats, rather than limited to a small number of groups.
- **Recommendation 4.2: Establish a Community Participation Fund** to strengthen local trust, connection and belonging. Most social cohesion is built close to home: in sporting clubs, schools, community centres, libraries, places of worship, parks and local events. These settings create everyday opportunities for connection that national campaigns cannot replicate. Funding should support community participation, connection and expression through initiatives such as events and festivals, sporting clubs, storytelling projects, interfaith dialogue, and grassroots organisations supporting local participation and civic engagement.

## Pillar 5: Whole of society, prevention-led response

A prevention-led approach recognises that hate incidents and social fragmentation are often symptoms of deeper structural issues: inequality, isolation, racism, weak trust in institutions and a lack of meaningful participation. Australia needs a whole-of-society strategy that invests in the conditions that enable belonging, fairness and connection long before crises emerge.

- **Recommendation 5.1: Fully implement the Multicultural Framework Review and the National Anti-Racism Framework** as holistic approaches to enabling social cohesion and addressing the root causes of social division. Together, these reforms provide a holistic roadmap for strengthening cohesion by tackling systemic and interpersonal racism, improving representation and participation, building trust in institutions, strengthening civic belonging.
- **Recommendation 5.2: Strengthen the social infrastructure that enables belonging**, specifically investing in and expanding Australia's settlement infrastructure. Belonging does not emerge organically; it is actively built through the institutions that support people as they settle and participate in Australian society. Community organisations, migrant resource centres, multicultural peak bodies, faith networks and grassroots leaders play a critical role in building trust across difference, supporting participation and connecting

communities to institutions and building trust in them. Together, these actors form the social infrastructure of belonging.

- **Recommendation 5.3: Strengthen anti-racism education in schools** by embedding it into the national curriculum, fund resources to support multifaith inclusive classroom practice and build the capability of school staff in anti-racism education, multicultural inclusion and multifaith understanding. Building capability in schools would help reduce prejudice early, improve student wellbeing and foster the next generation of inclusive citizens.
- **Recommendation 5.4: Introduce a positive duty in the Racial Discrimination Act** for employers and workplaces to proactively prevent racism rather than just respond to instances of racism after they have already occurred. A positive duty would shift the focus from reaction to prevention, similar to evolving approaches in workplace safety and sexual harassment law.
- **Recommendation 5.5: Broaden economic participation and improve social mobility** as foundations for social cohesion and belonging. Extremism thrives in situations where people are socially and economically isolated. By contrast, social cohesion is strengthened when people believe they have a fair chance to build a good life through work, education and effort, regardless of their background or socio-economic status. Governments should adopt a coordinated strategy to expand economic participation and upward mobility, particularly for groups facing structural barriers. This should include improving access to quality education and training, faster and fairer skills recognition, targeted employment pathways, affordable childcare, place-based job creation, stronger transport links to employment hubs, digital inclusion, and action to reduce discrimination in hiring and promotion. A society where more people can contribute, progress and share in prosperity is a society with stronger trust, deeper belonging and greater resilience against division.

As stated by the attached thought piece on the following page, jointly developed by civil society advocates including SSI, “the question is not whether Australia can become a more cohesive, integrated and generous nation. The question is whether we will finally choose to do what it takes.” Social cohesion is not achieved by demanding sameness or avoiding difficult conversations. It is built when people feel safe, respected, heard and able to participate fully in national life. With sustained commitment across governments, institutions and communities, Australia can remain a confident, inclusive and united society in an increasingly uncertain world.

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# BUILDING A NATION TOGETHER

*A Thought Piece on moving beyond Social Cohesion to build a Multicultural Australia*

**Background for engagement with the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion | Reference (d) on Social Cohesion**

Prepared by a group of civil society advocates as a contribution to a wider conversation; this document can be appended to individual submissions or drawn on to help frame submissions by individuals and organisations. Organisations only for identification, does not imply endorsement.

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## Where We Stand: An Honest Reckoning

Australia has arrived at a consequential moment. The violent attacks on members of the Jewish community and its allies on and around 14 December 2025 have confronted us with what happens when the slow erosion of social trust goes unaddressed. They have also reminded us that the work of building a cohesive, pluralist democracy is never finished — it must be actively tended, generation by generation.

Ours is an immigration nation ten generations deep, built upon the foundations of the world's oldest continuous cultures. That is a remarkable inheritance. Yet we have not fully honoured it. The marginalisation of First Nations peoples has left racism woven into our social fabric — not as an aberration, but as a practised capacity that can be turned, and has been turned, against Jews, Muslims, and many other communities differentiated by faith, culture and appearance.

Jewish Australians increasingly live with fear, some withdrawing from public life. Muslim Australians continue to navigate structural prejudice and suspicion. Many other communities carry the weight of prejudiced and discriminatory experiences they have been told to keep private. Meanwhile, government has commissioned review after review — the Multicultural Framework Review, the National Anti-Racism Strategy, the Antisemitism Envoy report, the Islamophobia Envoy report — and too often filed them away. The costs of that inaction are now undeniable.

*"When this recognition weakens, all Australians suffer." The challenge before the Royal Commission is not simply to name what has gone wrong, but to chart a credible path forward.*

## Reframing Social Cohesion as Social Resilience: Beyond Rules Towards Relationships

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The language we use shapes the solutions we can imagine. For too long, 'social cohesion' has been understood primarily as law and order — a condition maintained by the suppression of difference and the enforcement of compliance. This framing is not only inadequate; it is counterproductive.

A mature multicultural democratic nation requires something richer: a shared culture of recognition, mutuality and reciprocity. It asks us to understand that social cohesion is not a static equilibrium to be policed, but a living, dynamic process of nation-building — one in which difference is a creative resource, not a threat to be managed. It looks to the social resilience that emerges when these challenges are properly addressed. It looks to forming and sustaining cohesive resilience to overcome contemporary challenges and withstand and survive future shocks.

As a society built from immigration, Australian resilience requires three interlocking mechanisms as its organising framework:

- Settlement — the deliberate, well-resourced welcome of all who choose to make Australia home. Settlement is not a bureaucratic formality. It is the foundation of contribution, participation and a genuine stake in our shared future. Invest in settlement and people invest in Australia. Through effective settlement a deeper sense of belonging emerges. Neglect it, and alienation follows.
- Multiculturalism — the recognition of cultural diversity as a national resource, not a problem to be managed. Every community must feel it has a genuine voice at the table of nation-building — not merely a script written by others that they are expected to perform. Multiculturalism is contained within the embrace of a nation-building project where the right to culture for one means the right to culture for all, within a common set of democratic practices.
- Interculturalism — the active, ongoing engagement between communities in common tasks of nation-building, from the neighbourhood to the national. Recognition of difference is necessary but not sufficient. Cohesive resilience requires that diverse Australians work together to build the trust that underpins strong bridging relationships, and learn how to work together across their differences and through their commonalities..

Three foundations underpin this vision:

- Recognition — the active acknowledgment that every community's history, contribution and experience is part of the national story. This includes, centrally, the unfinished work of truth-telling with First Nations peoples, whose marginalisation teaches all other communities that belonging in Australia is conditional.

- Mutuality — the genuine understanding that what damages one community diminishes all. Antisemitism is not 'a Jewish problem'. Islamophobia is not 'a Muslim problem'. Each is a corrosive agent in the shared civic life of the whole nation.
- Reciprocity — the practical reality that intercultural collaboration makes all communities more capable, more creative and more secure. Nation-building is not a zero-sum contest; it is a generative project.

Together, these three dimensions do not merely describe cohesive resilience — they describe what nation-building in a pluralist democracy requires of its institutions and its people.

## The Path Forward: Four Calls to Action

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The Royal Commission has an opportunity to translate years of thoughtful review into genuine structural change. The following four recommendations draw on the substantive work already done and ask only that government now act on it with the care, purpose and urgency the moment demands.

### 1. Adopt Language That Reflects the Nation We Are Building

The institution's mandate — and the broader public conversation — should move deliberately beyond 'social cohesion' as a static or coercive concept. The vocabulary of nation-building, intercultural participation, mutual recognition and civic complementarity better describes what we are actually trying to achieve and invites communities into a project they can own, rather than a condition imposed upon them. We want a society built on cohesive resilience.

### 2. Establish a National Institution for Intercultural Nation-Building

As recommended in the Multicultural Framework Review, the national Government should legislate and properly resource a national body that consolidates the recommendations of the Multicultural Framework Review, while drawing on the relevant insights and proposals of the Race Discrimination Commissioner's work, and the findings of the Antisemitism and Islamophobia Envoys. The Australian Multicultural Council should in the meantime be resourced to initiate this process and implement the strategy so clearly laid out – which the Government accepted in principle but has not properly implemented. This is not another review body — it is an action institution, charged with building intercultural engagement, stimulating co-operation across communities, and widening shared understanding. The principle has been accepted; the urgency now demands the practice.

### 3. Embed Research, Legislative Support and Community Voice

The national body must have genuine capacity: to support and inform legislative change; to commission rigorous research into the conditions that foster or fracture social trust and build social resilience; and to create formal advisory pathways that ensure voices from across the diversity of Australian culture, language, age, gender and geography are heard and acted upon. Structural diversity within the institution itself is non-negotiable.

### 4. Build from the Ground Up Through Local Partnership

National frameworks only succeed when they are realised locally. The institution must work in close, sustained partnership with communities, local governments, state governments and civil society — identifying, documenting and communicating the practices that actually build intercultural collaboration in schools, suburbs, workplaces and faith communities. This is where social trust and productive collaboration are either made or broken, day by day. Serious investment is required in the development, implementation and evaluation of ongoing communication that helps inform Australians about how we can all play a part in the nation-building process. At a time when disinformation and misinformation are widespread, often promoted by bad-faith actors, with catastrophic effects on both cohesion and resilience, a serious strategy must be adopted and moved to the centre of national governance.

## A Closing Word

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Australians already possess most of what is needed. We understand that cultural diversity is a national strength. We know that being seen and included improves the wellbeing of all. We recognise that working together achieves more than working apart. The Royal Commission's task is to help translate that understanding into institutions, policies and practices robust enough to endure — and to ensure that no community in Australia is ever again left to face hatred alone.

*The question is not whether Australia can become a more cohesive, integrated and generous nation. The question is whether we will finally choose to do what it takes.*

April 2026