

Submission on: Bringing Together Aotearoa New Zealand: A Social Cohesion Strategic Framework

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Feedback to Social Cohesion Strategic Framework

Thank you for the opportunity to feedback on Social Cohesion Strategic Framework. This submission is made by Asian Family Services.

We would welcome further discussion on this feedback and look forward to engaging with the Social Cohesion team on the Social Cohesion Strategic Framework towards the shared vision “All people, whānau and communities thrive, belong and are respected in Aotearoa New Zealand.”.

1. The focus of this submission

This submission has been prepared to inform What Social Cohesion Look Like: Bringing Together Aotearoa New Zealand: A social cohesion strategic framework of the Ministry of Social Development. It summarises Asian Family Services’ view on the current gaps and unmet needs of the Asian and ethnic minority groups based on over 20 years of experience serving the Asian and ethnic minority group communities in New Zealand. It suggests several ideas and approaches that support the development of the future direction and content of the Ministry of Social Development (the Ministry’s) Strategy for Social Cohesion Framework.

1.1. Asian Population

The landscape of the population in New Zealand has significantly changed. The 2018 Census indicated that over 27 per cent of New Zealand’s population was born overseas with over 200 ethnicities.

707,598 people identified as being part of the Asian group at the 2018 New Zealand census, making up 15.1% of New Zealand’s population. This is an increase of 235,890 people (50.0%) since the 2013 census and 353,046 people (99.6%) since the 2006 census. The Asian population is the fastest-growing population and will make up a quarter of the New Zealand population in 20 years.

The term Asian in New Zealand represents many cultures and ethnicities, from Afghanistan in the west, India, China, Japan in the east, and Indonesia in the south¹. Ethnic refers to MELAA, former refugees or asylum seekers.

Distinguished Professor Paul Spoonley FRSNZ (Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand) reminds New Zealanders should consider the country’s future regarding the disruptive consequences of the underway demographic transformation. We believe the bill has not taken into consideration such changes.

We Welcome the Social Cohesion Strategic Framework

Asian Family Services’ vision is that “All people of Asian heritage and background lead flourishing and fulfilling lives in an equitable Aotearoa, New Zealand”. Asian Family Services are delighted to see a comprehensive consultation draft document that emphasises on “**All people, whānau and communities thrive, belong and are respected in Aotearoa New Zealand**” with outcomes that emphasise on

- People, whānau and communities feeling a sense of belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy.

¹ Categorisation of census for six major ethnic groups in New Zealand: European, Māori, Pacific peoples, Asian, MELAA (Middle Eastern / Latin American / African), and ‘Other ethnicity’.

- Influences on how much people feel that they belong, how much they feel they are part of a society they can see themselves in, based on where they spend their time.
- The institutions and ways we do things underpinning how we do things, including social rules and norms

The vision and outcomes appears to be a step in the right direction.

Asian Family Services want to acknowledge the thinking and enormous effort that has gone into the analysis and the draft from the Social Cohesion team at the Ministry of Social Development.

2. Racism and Unconscious Bias

While the draft strategy outlines a robust framework that sets out how the government can work with others, it is also designed so other organisations, communities, and people can use it to understand and improve social cohesion within their own lives and work. To achieve social cohesion in Aotearoa New Zealand, Asian Family Services believe that the strategic framework should address fundamental issues of racism and unconscious bias in New Zealand society.

New Zealand's immigration policy in the early 20th century was strongly influenced by racial ideology. Chinese and Indian populations were segregated in New Zealand. The Chinese Immigration and residency imposed during the 1920s rendered the poll tax. The Act also served to restrict Indians immigrating into New Zealand. However, the legislation was not repealed until 1944, which was long after other countries had abandoned such measures.

Looking at today's society in New Zealand, racism is still equally prevalent despite many people wanting to think otherwise. Before the COVID-19 pandemic reached New Zealand, race discrimination was established as a wide-reaching issue. According to the Human Rights report, four in ten respondents (40%) said they experienced some form of discrimination before COVID. The incidence was higher (around five in ten) among the Maori and Chinese, Asian, or Pacific. Negative online comments were the most common type of discrimination experienced, followed by negative experiences on the street or in public. Ethnicity/race-based discrimination was the most prevalent reason for the discrimination experienced pre-Covid. Besides the Human Rights Commission, the New Zealand Police also reported an increase in complaints of racism, mainly impacting Chinese people, as fears around Covid-19 increased. Furthermore, Netsafe also reported a 200 per cent increase in online racism during the lockdown period.

Systemic racism and social exclusion exists within the New Zealand society for the Asian and ethnic minority groups when accessing employment and public goods and services. It is ingrained in nearly every aspect of how people move through societies, and it disproportionately affects Asian and ethnic minority groups. State Services Commission figures from 2020 state that European staff are over-represented as Managers and Policy Analysts. Asian staff are highly represented as Contact Centre Workers, IT Professionals and Technicians. Asian and ethnic minority groups are still under-represented in the top three tiers of Public Service management despite Asians receiving the highest qualification from Bachelor's degrees, Post-graduations, Master's degrees, and Doctorate degrees in general compared with the New Zealand population.

Furthermore, Asian New Zealanders are still underrepresented in Parliament. Asian comprised 15.1 per cent of New Zealand's population. Only 5 per cent of MPs are Asian; therefore, almost 10 per cent below the proportion of the population.

Unfortunately, policymakers and the public sectors still largely ignore the ongoing racism and social exclusion experienced by the Asian and ethnic minority groups' needs. The ongoing issues have a persistent disadvantage for the Asian and ethnic minority groups, especially when accessing employment, health and social support services. Despite this, we have not seen any tangible national high-level policies that are in place to support and address the needs of the Asian and ethnic minority groups.

Many studies suggested unconscious bias might play a part in decision-making when the socially dominant groups often have implicit bias or prejudice against subordinate groups, and individuals usually prefer members of a category to which they belong. These biases can be a significant factor in decision-making resulting in erroneous and harmful decisions.

It is critical to remember that social systems are naturally distributed inequitably— the structure is designed to reward specific demographics for so long that the system's outcomes may appear unintentional but are rooted in discriminatory practices and beliefs.

3. Transforming Government Structure, Systems and Processes

In recent observation from Asian Family Services, members appointed to bodies where the Crown is interested in Government inquiries on behalf of the responsible Minister often lack Asian and ethnic minority groups representation, despite many high calibres of ethnic professionals with extensive knowledge and experience to support inquiry, achieving an equitable outcome for all New Zealanders. Having Asian and ethnic minority groups representatives early in the inquiry will enable a whole system view that is more social cohesive for the Asian and ethnic minority groups of Aotearoa.

Evidence that can be found for the lack of Asian and ethnic minority groups representation of recent inquiries includes Government inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction, Oranga Tangata, Oranga Whanau, New Zealand Health and Disability System Review, Hauora Manaaki ki Aoteroa Whanui. The inquiries' Terms of Reference are absent from the mandate and inclusivity to engage with the Asian and ethnic minority groups. Consequently, issues of the Asian and ethnic minority groups were often overlooked or included in the review documents. The National plan, Kia Kaha, Kia Maia, Kia Ora Aotearoa: COVID-19 Psychosocial and Mental Wellbeing Plan, neglected to mention or address the specific psychosocial needs of the Asian and ethnic minority groups. The Government Inquiry into the Mental Health report, He Ara, and the government's response to that report emphasised the need for strong communities, wellbeing promotion and prevention, early intervention during addiction and mental distress while failing to recognise the Asian and ethnic minority groups' needs. On top of that, the Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan Every Life Matters – He Tapu te Oranga o ia Tangata: Suicide Prevention Strategy 2019–2029 and Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2019–2024 for Aotearoa New Zealand equally failed in acknowledging and addressing the needs of the Asian and ethnic minority groups in those plans.

Furthermore, Asian Family Services believe that it is equally vital for New Zealand's central government organisations to have strong and influential Asian and ethnic minority groups leaders, especially in the executive position as public servants. Besides the bottom-up approach where the Asian and ethnic minority groups are empowered, the central government must strategically place influential Asian and ethnic minority group leaders at executive positions. Otherwise, the Asian and ethnic minority groups will not prosper if Asian and ethnic minority groups cannot participate in and contribute to the central government at a higher level on an equal basis with others.

We also want to see each Ministry incorporate the social cohesion strategic framework to provide a clear pathway, policy, funding, and accountability to achieve the best outcomes for the Asian and ethnic minority groups. Such as the Ministry of Police, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Education.

Asian Family Services believe we must continue to acknowledge and respect ethnic diversity, recognise the value it adds to the New Zealand government, and take tangible steps to ensure Asian and ethnic minority groups' experiences with the government are inclusive and accessible, responsive to their needs meet their expectations to become an inclusive society.

4. Loneliness and Social Isolation among Asians and Migrants

Asians and migrants were also most likely to experience loneliness. The New Zealand General Social Survey (2018) found that when compared to Europeans, Asians were 1.4 times more likely to be lonely most or all the time (4.3% vs 3.0%), 1.6 times more likely to be lonely some of the time (19.2% vs 12.3%), and 1.1 times more likely to be lonely a little of the time (25.0% vs 22.8%). Those who have recently migrated to New Zealand had a greater likelihood of being lonely than most other immigrants. We know people from China and India in the past found it much harder to make friends even after spending three years in New Zealand. Unfortunately, one in five Chinese immigrants may still not have made any friends. Due to Covid-19, this issue is often exacerbated. Asian people are, in general, experiencing higher incidences of prolonged loneliness. Indian communities have the most pronounced experiences of loneliness¹.

5. Recommendation

Asian Family Services believe it needs to take a step forward where the Asian and ethnic minority group's views and voices are embedded in the public services with leadership roles to challenge the status quotes and current views that are not inclusive or is contradictory to achieving a Social Cohesion Aotearoa. Asian Family Services hopes the Asian and ethnic minority groups will be included in the parliamentary process in legislation change or review so the Asian and ethnic minority groups' voices can be heard and understood.

The Public Service workforce needs to have the diversity and cultural competence to design and deliver customer-centred services to an increasingly diverse New Zealand and have Asian and ethnic minority group leadership that can promote the ethnic communities' view. A whole government approach to address the diversity and inclusion approach is paramount in ensuring the inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand where Asian and ethnic minority groups are empowered to contribute their skills, culture, and voice.

Asian Family Services wish that the Ministry consider investing in infrastructure contributed to the growth and effect, both through direct service delivery and enhanced access and by raising the standard of mainstream services delivery regarding cultural sensitivity and appropriateness to achieve social cohesion. Experience has shown that services that do not treat people with respect and acknowledge their differences (personalisation) will not be accessed early, readily, or often. The outcome is higher crime rates, poorer health on an individual level, costlier health on a systemic level, and overall wellbeing reduction.

The changing population landscape in New Zealand with the increasing diversity and projected with an increase Asian population in the next 30 years. Asian Family Services believe discussion on biculturalism in the context of multiculturalism is a must. How would this look in policies, service provisions, communities and individuals across government sectors in New Zealand? The information will help to inform the future direction of the social cohesion framework.

Ensuring the social cohesion framework will be endorsed across the government sector is key to making a meaningful impact on long-term changes, especially concerning systemic racism. Asian Family Services wants to acknowledge that change will be slow when shifting the generation of systemic issues. The changes can only be materialised when the whole government works together from policies, service provisions, communities and individuals levels with a long term commitment for sustainable funding and resources that serve as enablers. One of the strategies to consider includes running a long term racism campaign, taking the learning from Depression.org campaign fronted by Sir John Kirwan in shifting men's attitude toward mental health-seeking behaviour. A campaign that focuses on racism and shifting systemic issues of racism could be added to be part of the strategy.

Finally, Asian Family Services wish to see a clearer indication of how the social cohesion framework is to align with the Ministry of Ethnic Communities' latest strategic plan. A synergy of planning can help key government agencies make a more significant impact to ensure the framework's success.

6. About Us

Asian Family Services is an NGO service provider for people of Asian backgrounds affected by mental health issues and gambling harm. Our gambling harm minimisation services are delivered under a Ministry of Health contract and is funded from the gambling levy. Asian Family Services also operates an Asian Helpline (telephone counselling) for Asian clients wishing to access immediate mental health support or guidance. Our services are also offered in face to face in Auckland, Hamilton and Wellington by qualified counsellors, psychologists, social workers, and public health practitioners who speak Cantonese, English, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Thai, and Vietnamese. All our counsellors and social workers are registered with either the New Zealand Association of Counsellors, the Social Worker Registration Board New Zealand or the Drug and Alcohol Practitioners Association Aotearoa New Zealand as requested by the Ministry of Health the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act.

For over 20 years, AFS has had a strong public health programme and is well known, regarded and most importantly, trusted in the Asian community and among Asian health practitioners.

In 2016 AFS established Asian Wellbeing Services to provide non-gambling related counselling, psychological intervention, tailor-made psychoeducation and therapy workshops to individuals and related organisations. All these services are offered by qualified counsellors, social workers and public health practitioners who speak English, Cantonese, Hindi, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Thai, and Vietnamese.

Additionally, AFS uses its website and social media channels Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and WeChat to share mental health and addiction information and resources in Asian languages and promote our services to Asian communities nationwide.

Reference

ⁱ Scoular, S (2020). Prolonged loneliness in New Zealand before, during, and after lockdown. Loneliness New Zealand. Loneliness New Zealand Charitable Trust.