



Submission to the

SELECT COMMITTEE ON COVID-19 INQUIRY INTO
THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

28 May 2020

1. Introduction

1.1 All Together Now -- a nationally-focussed racial equity organisation -- has prepared this submission to the Select Committee. This submission highlights some of the specific, intersecting issues that have occurred during COVID-19 in relation to the race, cultural and linguistic background, nationality, and visa status of individuals and groups, and the impact that the Australian Government's response has had.

1.2 All Together Now believes that the social conditions needed to prevent racism and support those most at risk have been lacking for some time. This has exacerbated the areas of concern highlighted below.

2. Temporary visa holders unable to access income support

2.1 There are over one million people living, working and studying in Australia on temporary visas. All Together Now is very concerned about the welfare of residents on temporary visas, who have been excluded from accessing the JobKeeper and JobSeeker schemes.

2.2 This issue has been well documented in many news articles and advocacy campaigns during COVID-19 and therefore All Together Now has chosen not to extrapolate here but instead refer the Select Committee to the many personal stories and accounts published online of people struggling to survive without government support.

Recommendation 1: The government should extend income support (specifically JobKeeper or JobSeeker) to include people living in Australia on temporary visas.

3. A rise in reports of interpersonal racism

3.1 All Together Now is very concerned about the rise in reports of interpersonal racism during the COVID-19 pandemic. Australian research indicates that targets of racist behaviour may experience [anxiety and depression along with other negative health effects](#). The economic impacts of these health effects come at [a greater cost to the Australian economy than the negative health effects of smoking](#).

3.2 During COVID-19, targets have largely been people who are – or appear to be – of Asian descent. We refer the Select Committee to survey data collected by a collaboration between The Asian Australian Alliance, Diversity Arts Australia and Democracy in Colour demonstrating that [81% of respondents have personally experienced racism](#) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.3 All Together Now notes that racism and the COVID-19 pandemic has co-occurred in an environment in which there is not a national anti-racism strategy, nor a national public education campaign compelling people to speak out against racism and normalise pro-social behaviour.

Recommendation 2: The government should fund the creation of a national anti-racism strategy and public education campaign in partnership with representative bodies and advocacy groups. This should include a plan for data collection accessible by researchers in both academia and advocacy organisations.

Recommendation 3: The government should invest in research that enables ongoing data collection and research into incidences of racism. The information collected should feed into the national anti-racism strategy and public education campaign.

4. Right wing extremists are capitalising on COVID-19

4.1 On 24 February 2020 the ASIO Chief made this grave warning: “In Australia, the extreme right-wing threat is real and it is growing.” All Together Now believes this threat is even more serious now due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

4.2 All Together Now has observed an increase of anti-Asian and anti-Semitic hate speech within right-wing extremist groups online, specifically blaming Asians for starting COVID-19 and Jews for manipulating it. Right-wing groups at the most extreme end of the spectrum have been advocating for the spread of the disease as a form of genocide among certain groups and in certain countries.

4.3 All Together Now is also concerned about right-wing extremists who have appropriated hateful conspiracy theories. Their aim is to perpetrate hate, recruit new compatriots, heighten distrust of the government's response, and undermine our democracy. Their "solution" involves positioning national socialism and/or the formation of whites-only enclaves or communities as potential ways forward.

4.4 All Together Now is concerned that the lack of a federal strategy to counter right-wing extremism at the community level (commonly known as Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism programs) may have potentially devastating consequences. One year after the 15 March terrorist attack by an Australian-born extremist in two Christchurch mosques, the Australian Government has not addressed this urgent issue, which is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic in a wide range of ways including higher unemployment rates and loneliness of young people.

4.5 All Together Now points the Select Committee to its position paper published 20 May 2020 titled [Right-Wing Extremism and COVID-19 in Australia](#) for further details.

Recommendation 4: The government should fund the creation of a national community-focussed strategy to counter right-wing extremism with relevant community and advocacy groups. It should also adequately fund the proposed activities to enact the strategy.

Recommendation 5: The government should provide ongoing financial support to RMIT ABC Fact Check or other independent fact checking organisation so that it may counter hateful conspiracy theories.

5. Government information about COVID-19 is not accessible by all Australians

5.1 All Together Now, along with other organisations in the multicultural sector, is concerned that the federal government did not have an effective outreach engagement plan for multicultural communities who may not have digital literacy, access to digital networks, and/or

English literacy. In particular, behaviour change advice and directives from government -- which are vital during a health pandemic -- were not made accessible to all Australians.

5.2 We note that SBS shared multi-language information about COVID-19. However SBS coverage should not be taken for granted as the disseminator for multilingual government health information, nor should it be assumed that SBS coverage will reach all communities regardless of language or connectivity.

5.3 We refer you to the open letter sent to Minister Hunt and signed by several organisations in the multicultural sector in early April, requesting that the federal Department of Health act quickly to remedy this situation.

Recommendation 6: The government should ensure that health information about COVID-19 reaches all multicultural communities, regardless of language or technology barriers.

6. There is not a Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms to protect Australian residents

6.1 All Together Now believes that these recommendations could be further bolstered through the government's support of a Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms which would provide benefits for all Australians.

6.2 According to [the Law Council of Australia](#), Australia is the only western democracy without a Charter or Bill of Human Rights, as all countries with legal and political systems similar to Australia have a Bill or Charter of Human Rights. A Charter can ensure that even in a crisis there are important checks and balances to ensure proper oversight and accountability.

Recommendation 7: The government should support a Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.

7. Submission details

This submission was prepared by All Together Now and submitted on 28 May 2020.

All Together Now is a racial equity organisation that seeks to educate Australians about racism. We do this by imagining and delivering innovative and evidence based projects that promote racial equity. We are community driven, we utilise partnered approaches and our work is intersectional. For more information please see our website at <https://alltogethernow.org.au>.

As All Together Now's office is currently unattended due to COVID-19 restrictions, please contact us by email in the first instance:

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All Together Now was established in 2010 and is registered with the ACNC.

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