

COMING TOGETHER
AROUND SHARED
ASPIRATIONS



CONCEPT NOTES

2025
National
Social
Cohesion
And Inclusion
Conference

Conference Table Group Discussion

Concept Notes

Session #1: Unifying Dialogue and Consensus Building

A socially cohesive society works towards the wellbeing of all its members. It promotes inclusion, belonging and trust, fosters progress through participation and dialogue, and offers everyone the opportunity to flourish and contribute to a just and prosperous society. Social cohesion extends beyond economics and security—it encapsulates the full human experience. In the first series of roundtables of the *Creating an Inclusive Narrative* project conducted in 2019/20, participants articulated the need for a richer description of social cohesion—one that includes the values, qualities and characteristics around which society can coalesce.

- What progress has been made in recent years in Australia to promote and strengthen social cohesion? What obstacles have been overcome, and what obstacles remain? What insights and lessons have we learned along the way?
- What are the values, norms and approaches that strengthen inclusion, belonging and social harmony?

In an era marked by deep divisions and tribalism, where conversations often descend into contention rather than understanding, it can be increasingly difficult to find common ground. Adversarial methods of debate, partisanship, or protest are not conducive to building unity or consensus, and when we bring together only those who are likeminded to discuss issues that have a bearing on all of society, this may not allow for shared understanding to arise nor generate the collective will to act.

- How can we strengthen our capacity to bring people from different viewpoints and backgrounds together to explore a common set of questions and discuss their lived experiences? What characterizes such dialogue? How can it acknowledge and unlock the capacity of every individual and group to contribute to constructive social change?

Session #2: First Nations Perspectives

Australia has achieved a great deal in building a relatively peaceful and harmonious multicultural society. Still, much work remains for the country to live up to its ideals. The fuller embrace of the rich diversity of knowledge and experience within our country can lead to much better outcomes. The challenges we face as a society are complex, and no one group, ideology or culture has all the answers. The more we draw on our diversity, the more complete will be the picture of social reality available to all, and the richer the pool of perspectives and methods of thought available to draw on. Blind spots can be minimised or removed, and decisions be more robust and durable.

- What can we learn from First Nations perspectives and knowledge to advance social cohesion? How can this meaningfully integrate into our understanding of unity, harmony, interconnectedness, dialogue, belonging, inclusion and our common humanity?
- How can we draw on diverse perspectives in ways that meaningfully inform and shape our shared understanding, moving beyond acknowledgement and celebration?

Session #3 – Communities as Protagonists:

Communities are a vital element of our society, whether defined by cultural, ethnic, religious, geographic or other affiliations. They emerge from the different interactions and associations we have with one another and can often serve as support systems for both the existing and the newly arrived, helping people navigate the complexities of culture and society. People find a place of inclusion, belonging, and a sense of purpose in community and can foster healthy patterns of thought and behaviour. In communities, individuals of different ages, backgrounds and groups come together regularly and draw on their intergenerational, intercultural and interfaith wisdom.

A reassuring theme of the Australian story has been the capacity for people to come together as communities to address challenges. This spirit is particularly apparent in times of crisis but can also be seen in the collaboration and sharing of cultural heritage and knowledge. Communities, including those of new arrivals, have much to contribute and have a great desire to do so.

- What are the current conceptions of 'community' that we have in Australia? And how has our understanding of these changed over time?
- What role do communities play in fostering social cohesion in Australia? What capacities and resources already exist, or are needed, within communities, which can help to strengthen social cohesion? How are we becoming more aware of these and how are communities being supported to contribute these to our collective endeavors?
- How can institutions/organisations work together more creatively with communities to contribute to the strengthening of social cohesion? How can they support communities to engage with one another more effectively?

Session #4 – Neighbourhoods as settings for learning and impact

The *2025 Mapping Social Cohesion Report* notes that one of the sources of community strength in recent years has been in neighbourhood connections and cohesion. “Most Australians continue to report high levels of local connection and neighbourliness,” and this provides “an important source of connection, belonging and resilience in local communities. These, in turn, potentially support social cohesion across the country.”¹

The *Creating an Inclusive Narrative* publication notes that neighbourhoods are unique environments that deserve particular attention and support from all levels of society. In a neighbourhood we have a shared identity and status: that we are all ‘neighbours’ to someone. “It is in neighbourhoods that intensive learning about social cohesion can take place and be sustained. It is the shared space where diverse individuals have the opportunity to come together to draw on the intergenerational, intercultural and interfaith wisdom, and the range of experiences, skills and talents that they all possess.” “All share a common social reality, and all can make small, but meaningful contributions to social change.”²

- What does social cohesion in neighborhoods look like? How is it proving to be an important source of connection, belonging and resilience? How can it strengthen the ‘social, emotional and practical bonds’ among diverse groups of people?
- What are the processes and endeavours that bring people together and help foster a greater sense of togetherness and connection in the neighborhood? What helps to sustain and strengthen such engagement?

¹ The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, *2025 Mapping Social Cohesion Report* (2025).

² Australian Baha’i Community, *Creating an Inclusive Narrative*, (2021)