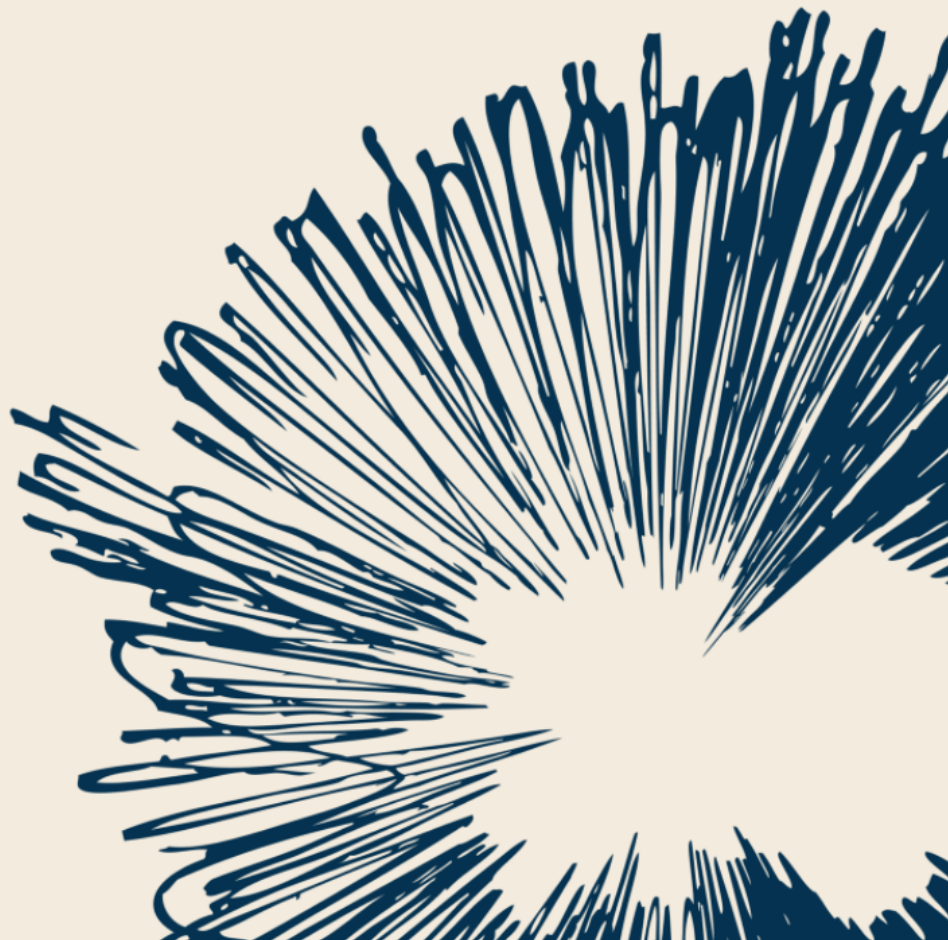


Submission

Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion

May 2026



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Foreword

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is providing this submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion as the professional society representing psychologists and psychological scientists in Australia. The perspective articulated in this submission draws on academic literature and social psychology research regarding intergroup dynamics at a societal level and how they contribute to antisemitism and social cohesion.

The submission does not seek to speak on behalf of Jewish Australians with lived experience of antisemitism, either individually or collectively. Those experiences are central to the work of the Royal Commission, and others are better placed to represent them directly. For example, we draw attention to the Australian Jewish Psychologists' submission*. While our submission is grounded in psychological research rather than direct lived experience testimony, we acknowledge the profound harms, hurt, fear, and isolation that antisemitism causes and commend the bravery and candour of Jewish Australians who have and will share their experiences with the Commission. Together, we hope this process can contribute to recognition, accountability, and healing for Jewish people and communities, and support a more socially cohesive Australia.

* Australian Jewish Psychologists' Submission to the Royal Commission into Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, 2026 (*Reference number ASC009918*).

Introduction

The APS recognises the significant impact of antisemitism in Australia and acknowledges the considerable distress, fear, and uncertainty being currently experienced, and previously experienced by Jewish people and their communities. Recent incidents, including the Bondi terrorist attack, and other antisemitic events, have exacerbated this community's vulnerability and caused significant psychological harm that has been both severe and sustained. Members of the Jewish community experience ongoing distress at a profoundly personal level, reflected in increased levels of anxiety, hypervigilance and fear consistent with exposure to trauma^{1,2}.

The impact of recent events has drawn national attention to broader patterns of social fragmentation, polarisation, and intergroup tension³. These dynamics reflect the wider pressures shaping how individuals and groups relate to one another in a diverse society. It is critical that antisemitism and other forms of hostility and discrimination are addressed to prevent further harm and distress.

Experiences of antisemitic and other forms of intergroup hostility can have substantial psychological, behavioural and social impacts on individuals and communities. These impacts may arise not only from direct victimisation, but also from indirect and perceived threat associated with social exclusion and repeated and ongoing exposure to violent, threatening, hostile or dehumanising rhetoric, online discourse, and public expressions.

The effects of these conditions may extend beyond immediate incidents or experiences and can be cumulative and enduring over time, including in ways currently being reported by Jewish people and communities through the Royal Commission's hearings and consultation processes.

The impacts of antisemitism can manifest across multiple interconnected domains:

- *Psychological and behavioural impacts:* Jewish individuals and communities may experience fear, anxiety, heightened vigilance to potential threat, anticipatory and ongoing stress responses, sleep disturbance, and emotional exhaustion. In response to the experience of threat and hostility, people in targeted groups may also modify everyday behaviour as a protective mechanism, including concealment of identity, self-monitoring, avoidance of particular settings, or remaining silent in settings where it does not feel psychologically safe to speak openly^{1,2}.
- *Identity, belonging and participation:* Persistent hostility and uncertainty may contribute to a diminished sense of belonging, identity threat, and uncertainty about acceptance within the broader community⁴. This may affect willingness to participate openly in educational, professional, community, and civic life, particularly where individuals perceive heightened risk associated with visibly expressing Jewish identity, and concerns about hostile, discriminatory or exclusionary responses. These conditions may also reinforce more guarded or protective community dynamics and contribute to concern about potential social, professional, or reputational consequences associated with visibly expressing Jewish identity⁵.
- *Institutional trust and confidence:* Inconsistent responses to experiences of antisemitic, or perceived lack of institutional support, may diminish confidence that community, professional and public institutions will respond fairly, consistently, and effectively to protect safety, inclusion, and equal participation^{6,7}.

Taken together, these experiences also point to the importance of a trauma-informed understanding of antisemitism that recognises the cumulative, historical and enduring psychological impacts associated with ongoing exposure to violence, threat, hostility, uncertainty, and social exclusion, and the broader implications these experiences may have for individual and collective wellbeing, participation, trust, and social cohesion^{8,9}.

Psychology provides a robust, evidence base for understanding the drivers of antisemitism and other forms of intergroup hostility, the cumulative and enduring psychological impacts associated with repeated exposure to hostility and threat, and the conditions that support trust, belonging, and cooperation within diverse societies. Drawing on these perspectives, this submission examines the psychological and psychosocial conditions that influence intergroup relations and social cohesion in Australia, particularly in the context of antisemitism. This perspective is critical for informing effective, evidence-based approaches to preventing the emergence and escalation of hostility while strengthening social cohesion.

List of recommendations

Informed by the Royal Commission's Terms of Reference focusing on tackling antisemitism and social cohesion, the APS submission adopts a psychologically grounded approach to examining antisemitism in Australia, with particular focus on its drivers, impacts, and prevention. The submission is organised thematically, addressing the broader social cohesion context, the psychological drivers of intergroup hostility, and implications for evidence-based prevention and response.

Across these areas, the APS makes a range of recommendations for reform and action. For convenience, the recommendations included throughout the submission are summarised below:

Recommendation 1: Adopt a principled, psychologically informed and trauma informed framework to guide the design and implementation of interventions to address antisemitism and strengthen social cohesion. Responses should recognise the lived experience and cumulative impacts of antisemitism, be targeted to the underlying drivers of intergroup attitudes and behaviour, operate across systems and contexts, and balance prevention with timely and responsive action, informed by engagement with affected communities and psychological expertise.

Recommendation 2: Invest in structured, sustained intergroup engagement programs to reduce rigid group boundaries, stereotyping and exclusion. Programs should be designed in line with evidence on effective intergroup conditions, including equal status, cooperation, shared goals, and institutional support from leadership and organisations, with delivery prioritised in settings that enable sustained engagement. Where contact-based approaches are used, they should be contextually appropriate and designed to avoid reliance on incidental proximity, one-off activities, or harmony-focused interaction alone, with explicit attention to power, inequality and lived experience.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen government and institutional communication to challenge threat-based interpretations of social change and issues. Strategies should promote clear, consistent and timely communication, particularly during periods of uncertainty, and counter narratives that place collective blame on, or portray incompatibility between, particular groups.

Recommendation 4: Invest in accessible psychological supports and evidence-informed programs. This should include timely access to appropriate individual and group supports to help manage emotional responses that can contribute to hostile intergroup attitudes and behaviours, and the provision of targeted, trauma-informed support for individuals and communities affected by antisemitism and related exclusion and discrimination; support for Jewish mental health professionals working with their own communities; and support for culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice across the mental health workforce.

Recommendation 5: Strengthen the systems that shape what is seen as normal and acceptable in public discourse. This should include coordinated, evidence-based strategies to strengthen leadership signalling across political, institutional and community settings; improve the integrity of the information environment by reducing the spread of harmful and misleading content, including antisemitic narratives; and strengthen public capability to critically engage with information.

Recommendation 6: Promote inclusive constructions of national identity and belonging. This should include coordinated, evidence-based public communication, education, and public institutional responses that include inclusive narratives of national identity; recognise dual and multiple identities within a shared national framework; and ensure the recognition and representation of diverse communities.

Recommendation 7: Strengthen institutional trust, fairness and inclusion. This should include coordinated, evidence-based approaches to ensure procedural fairness in decision-making; deliver timely, consistent and proportionate responses to antisemitism and other forms of discrimination; embed inclusive engagement with communities in policy and service design; and strengthen data collection, monitoring and evaluation to support accountability, continuous improvement, and evidence-informed responses.

About the Australian Psychological Society (APS)

The APS is the leading professional association for psychologists in Australia. APS members work across a broad range of sectors including health, educational, organisational, community, and forensic settings, applying psychological science to improve individual and collective mental health and wellbeing.

The APS is committed to advancing the discipline and profession of psychology, supporting high standards of practice, and promoting the application of evidence-based psychological knowledge to inform policy, services, and community outcomes. This includes a commitment to equity, inclusion, and the fair and respectful treatment of all individuals and communities, recognising the role these principles play in supporting psychological wellbeing and social cohesion.

Drawing on expertise across research, practice, and policy, the APS provides independent, evidence-informed advice to governments, organisations, and the broader community. This includes supporting the design and implementation of effective approaches to complex social and behavioural challenges in ways that are responsive to diverse communities and grounded in principles of fairness and inclusion.

Response to the Royal Commission Terms of Reference

1. Social cohesion

Social cohesion can be understood as the 'psychological glue' that enables individuals and groups to function collectively within a society. From a psychological perspective, social cohesion is shaped by the quality of relationships between individuals and groups, the degree of trust in others and in institutions, and the extent to which people feel a sense of belonging and shared purpose^{5,7}.

Psychological science conceptualises social cohesion as a multi-dimensional set of conditions characterised by the quality of relationships, sense of belonging, and patterns of cooperation within a community^{3,5,6}. It encompasses both horizontal relationships between individuals and groups, and vertical relationships between individuals and institutions⁵.

Psychological research consistently links high levels of social cohesion with trust, both in others and in institutions^{6,7,10,11}. This trust supports inclusive forms of belonging, perceptions of fairness in treatment, and a willingness to engage in collective life⁷. Where these conditions are compromised, participation declines, and social divisions can deepen.

Recent national security assessments⁵ have highlighted growing concern about the dynamics undermining social cohesion. Declining trust in institutions, increasing polarisation, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation contribute to strains on social cohesion and elevate the risk of intergroup conflict. While this divisiveness is not confined to any single group or issue; these dynamics are reflected in the rise of antisemitism experienced by Jewish Australians and represent a systemic risk that can affect multiple communities and undermine national cohesion as a whole¹².

Importantly, social cohesion should not be misconstrued as merely the absence of conflict, nor is it uniformly positive. Psychological research highlights that strong cohesion within a group can coexist with hostility toward outgroups, indicating that social bonds can foster exclusionary attitudes^{7,13,14}. Thus, social cohesion should not be used as a catch-all term for all factors contributing to or resulting from a well-functioning society. If defined too broadly, it becomes harder to measure and less useful for informing policy⁵.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

Psychological science provides robust evidence on how factors such as belonging, perceived threat, social norms, trust, and cooperation develop and are sustained. These same underlying psychological conditions that support or undermine social cohesion also shape the context in which discrimination, including antisemitism can emerge, spread, and become normalised within society¹⁵.

Antisemitism is a specific form of prejudice that draws on historically embedded narratives and representations, giving it unique forms, impacts, and risks. However, many of the processes through which antisemitism intensifies reflect broader dynamics that drive social exclusion, polarisation, and breakdowns in trust¹.

Recognising the multifaceted nature of social cohesion is critical for developing effective responses to antisemitism.

By addressing these underlying psychological and social dynamics, policies and interventions can strengthen inclusive communities and reduce the conditions in which antisemitism and other forms of intergroup hostility are more likely to emerge and persist.

These dynamics provide a foundation for understanding the specific psychological drivers of antisemitism, which are examined in the following section.

2. Drivers of intergroup hostility

2.1. Defining boundaries of belonging: Social categorisation and identity

Psychological research demonstrates that a key driver of intergroup hostility lies in how boundaries of belonging are defined within a society^{16,17}. Social categorisation processes organise the social world into “us” and “them”, fundamentally shaping how individuals interpret others and understand their own place within the broader community¹⁶. These processes often operate rapidly and outside conscious awareness, closely tied to identity, as individuals derive part of their self-concept from the groups to which they belong.

While social categorisation is a normal and necessary cognitive mechanism for navigating social environments, it plays a pivotal role in defining the boundaries between groups. When these boundaries are perceived as fixed or socially significant, individuals are more likely to be evaluated through the lens of group membership rather than as unique individuals. This dynamic increases the likelihood of generalisations, stereotypes, and group-based judgements¹⁷.

In contexts where social networks are highly segregated, limited opportunities for meaningful interaction across groups can reinforce reliance on stereotypes and indirect information. This can create a feedback loop in which misconceptions about outgroups are reinforced, contributing to entrenched biases and hostility^{15,18}. Limited direct contact further reduces opportunities for empathy and understanding.

The influence of social categorisation is highly context dependent. During periods of heightened social or political tension, group identities become more salient, emphasising perceived differences and fuelling intergroup conflict¹⁷. In such environments, belonging may become conditional, with acceptance dependent on alignment with dominant norms, values, or expectations¹⁹.

These dynamics help explain how intergroup hostility can emerge and be sustained. When individuals are primarily understood through group membership, differences are more easily generalised, leading to more rigid intergroup boundaries. This can foster the “us versus them” dynamic, where groups perceived as not fully belonging to the national community face increased exclusion and deepening social divisions^{4,15,19}.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

In the context of antisemitism, social categorisation processes can position Jewish identity as a primary and defining lens through which individuals are perceived. This can lead to Jewish people being understood less in terms of personal characteristics and as individuals and more in terms of assumed group membership.

This dynamic creates conditions in which generalised beliefs about Jewish people can be more readily formed, maintained, and applied across individuals, reinforcing perceptions of difference and limiting recognition of individual variation.

As a result, these processes can entrench rigid boundaries of belonging and increase the likelihood that Jewish individuals and communities are perceived as distinct from, or not fully part of, the broader social group. In doing so, they provide a foundation upon which other processes, including perceived threat and exclusionary norms, can emerge and intensify antisemitism.

2.2. Why divisions intensify: Perceived threat and uncertainty

The research shows that perceptions of threat play a central role in intensifying intergroup divisions^{2,20}. Perceived threat can take different forms, including “realistic threats” to safety or resources, which may arise from perceived or constructed competition between groups, and “symbolic threats” to values, identity, or way of life^{2,21}. These perceptions can influence attitudes and behaviour regardless of their objective basis².

Threat is particularly influential under conditions of uncertainty. Psychological research indicates that when individuals experience uncertainty, they are more likely to seek clarity and security through stronger identification with social groups^{22,23}. Broader contextual factors, including economic instability and geopolitical conflict, can heighten uncertainty and increase the likelihood that social issues are interpreted through a threat-based lens¹⁷. Under these conditions, individuals may respond by strengthening ingroup identification and adopting more negative attitudes toward outgroups^{22,23}.

Perceived threat can also shape how groups are represented and understood, particularly when group identities become salient in public discourse. Under these conditions, individuals and communities may be interpreted through a threat-based lens, including through attributing collective responsibility, exaggerating influence, or drawing on stereotypes that position groups as destabilising to social or cultural order^{1,2}. Such narratives can reinforce suspicion and exclusion, undermining trust and shared belonging.

In this way, perceptions of threat can both intensify intergroup hostility and erode the conditions that support social cohesion. The expression of these attitudes, however, is not inevitable. It is shaped by the broader normative and discourse environment, which influences what is seen as acceptable within a society.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

In the context of antisemitism, perceived threat is often not based on direct competition for resources, but on historically embedded narratives that attribute hidden or disproportionate influence or collective responsibility for broader social or political developments to Jewish individuals and communities¹⁵. These perceptions can be intensified under conditions of uncertainty, including during periods of social or geopolitical instability, and may be reinforced through public discourse and social representations that frame Jewish communities through a threat-based lens.

Such perceptions are often accompanied by emotional responses, such as fear, anger, or resentment, which can further intensify hostility and increase support for exclusionary attitudes^{2,24}.

Taken together, these processes highlight how antisemitism can emerge and intensify through the interaction of social categorisation and perceived threat. The categorisation of Jewish individuals primarily through a group identity can facilitate stereotyping, collective attribution, and perceptions of difference and exclusion.

Under conditions of heightened uncertainty, these perceptions may be further amplified through threat-based narratives, including those that attribute disproportionate influence or collective responsibility to Jewish people.

These interacting dynamics can reinforce “us versus them” distinctions, increase susceptibility to exclusionary attitudes, and contribute to the persistence and escalation of antisemitism within broader patterns of intergroup hostility.

2.3. Social norms, belonging, and institutional trust

Beyond defining who is perceived to belong, psychological research highlights the broader social and institutional environment as shaping what attitudes and behaviours are considered acceptable, as well as whether individuals feel included within, and willing to engage with, the broader community. This environment is shaped through the interaction of leadership, the information environment, public narratives, and institutional practices, which dynamically influence and reinforce one another.

Collectively, these processes shape perceived social norms, individuals’ sense of belonging and identification with the broader community, and levels of trust in institutions. These factors, in turn, influence behaviour and social cohesion, including how discrimination, including antisemitism, may emerge, be reinforced, or challenged within society.

2.3.1. Leadership

Political, institutional, and community leaders play a crucial role in shaping social norms and collective interpretations of events. Through their statements, policy framing, and symbolic actions, leaders influence how issues are understood and what attitudes and behaviours are perceived as acceptable^{13,25,26}. Leadership that emphasises inclusivity and shared identity can foster a sense of belonging across diverse groups, while divisive or exclusionary rhetoric may contribute to normalisation of negative attitudes and behaviours⁶.

From a psychological perspective, this influence operates through processes such as modelling and reinforcement^{25,27}. Individuals often look to leaders as role models, using their behaviour as cues for interpreting events and responding to others. When inclusive behaviours and norms are consistently modelled, they establish expectations within the community. A prominent leader who openly condemns antisemitism sends a strong message that such views are unacceptable. In contrast, leaders who endorse divisive narratives, or minimise, dismiss, or fail to respond to antisemitic incidents or rhetoric, may signal that such views are tolerated or legitimate, thereby normalising exclusionary attitudes⁶. Leaders can strengthen social cohesion by modelling constructive public discourse, including respectful disagreement, active listening, perspective-taking, and engagement with competing views without personal attack or disparagement²⁸.

Leaders also influence how group identities and boundaries are defined, shaping shared understandings of “who we are” and what it means to belong^{25,26}. Through their language, policies, and actions, they impact what it means to belong to the broader community and who is recognised as a legitimate member²⁵. Leadership that emphasises shared goals, mutual respect, and inclusive belonging can strengthen social cohesion, particularly during periods of heightened tension. When leaders communicate openly and consistently, they are more likely to be trusted, reinforcing collective norms that support inclusion^{19,25}. In contrast, leadership that draws on narratives of threat, grievance, or incompatibility can heighten perceptions of conflict and contribute to intergroup hostility^{13,29}.

Importantly, top-down signals from leadership can outweigh bottom-up cohesion efforts⁶. Even well-designed community-level programs aimed at strengthening social cohesion may be undermined when broader political or institutional signals reinforce division. This underscores the critical role of leadership in shaping the wider social environment and the challenges associated with promoting inclusive norms^{6,30}.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

In the context of antisemitism, leadership influences the broader conditions under which antisemitic attitudes are either constrained or able to gain traction within public discourse.

Clear and consistent leadership signals can establish normative boundaries around antisemitism, reducing uncertainty about what is acceptable. Ambiguity, inconsistency, or silence can weaken those boundaries, creating conditions in which antisemitic views are more likely to be voiced, tolerated, or normalised.

Given the influence of top-down signals, leadership plays a critical role in determining whether efforts to address antisemitism are reinforced or undermined at a system level. Where leadership signals align with inclusive norms, they can strengthen trust, cohesion, and the effectiveness of broader interventions. Where they do not, they can contribute to the persistence and spread of antisemitism, even in the presence of other mitigating efforts.

2.3.2. The information environment and social representations

The broader information environment, including traditional media, social media, and public discourse, plays a central role in shaping how social issues and groups are represented and understood. These representations influence whether groups are perceived as legitimate, threatening, or as belonging within the broader social fabric, and shape the context in which attitudes and behaviours develop^{31,32}. Information environments that amplify threat, conflict, or polarisation can increase intergroup tension, while those that support accurate information and constructive dialogue can promote more cooperative social dynamics¹.

The spread of misinformation and disinformation further distorts these dynamics by reinforcing simplified, stereotyped, or inaccurate representations of groups, exaggerating perceived risks, and framing groups as dangerous or incompatible. Such processes can amplify perceived threat and increase the likelihood of anxiety, hostility and exclusionary attitudes^{33,34}. Confirmation bias can exacerbate these effects, leading individuals to preferentially attend to information that aligns with their existing beliefs³⁵.

Through repeated exposure and selective amplification, hostile narratives and derogatory attitudes may become normalised, increasing the likelihood that individuals adopt or express similar views. This is particularly relevant to forms of discrimination such as antisemitism, which can manifest in both overt and implicit forms within social norms^{1,19,36}.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

In the context of antisemitism, the information environment plays a critical role in shaping the conditions under which it is encountered, interpreted, and responded to.

Patterns of visibility and amplification can influence which narratives are perceived as credible or widely held, affecting whether antisemitic ideas are seen as marginal or part of broader public discourse and social norms. This can shape individuals' willingness to express, challenge, or remain silent in response to such views. These dynamics also affect the capacity of individuals and institutions to identify and respond to antisemitism.

Where antisemitic content is ambiguous, indirect, or embedded within broader narratives and social norms, it can be harder to recognise and interpret consistently. This can lead to uncertainty in how individuals and institutions respond, with some choosing to challenge such content and others remaining silent. When responses are inconsistent or absent, antisemitism is less likely to be actively contested and may instead persist within public discourse. Over time, this shapes both how visible antisemitism is and how acceptable it is perceived to be, influencing its trajectory within the broader social environment.

2.3.3. National identity and narratives of belonging

National identity encompasses shared understandings of what it means to be “Australian” and belong to the nation. It is not a static construct; it may be defined through civic criteria based on shared values and legal commitments or ethnic and cultural definitions rooted in ancestry, traditions, and religion³⁷. These differing conceptions influence who is included or excluded from the national community. Individuals may identify with some aspects of the national identity (such as its institutions or values) while not identifying with others, including the dominant cultural or social group³⁸.

Narratives of belonging serve as the mechanism through which these definitions are constructed and communicated. Influenced by leadership, the information environment, and broader societal discourse, these narratives determine which understandings of national identity become dominant, and who is recognised as a legitimate member of the national community^{31,39,40}. Inclusive definitions allow subgroup identities (e.g. Jewish, Muslim, immigrant) to coexist within a broader national identity, fostering positive intergroup attitudes^{18,19}. Conversely, narratives that position certain groups as incompatible with national identity can encourage exclusion and identity conflict, contributing to discrimination and intolerance as seen in antisemitism^{4,41}.

Narratives of belonging are shaped not only by contemporary discourse, but also by shared interpretations of history. Leaders, institutions, and public discourse may draw on national narratives about past conflicts, migration, or cultural heritage to shape perceptions of who is recognised as part of the national community and who is positioned as outside it. While this can support cohesion, it may also frame certain groups as outsiders or as threatening, reinforcing exclusionary narratives²². This may include the reactivation of longstanding narratives that position certain groups as external to the national story or as exerting disproportionate influence.

A strong sense of belonging to a national community motivates individuals to engage positively with others and act in the broader community’s interests. This motivation is strengthened when individuals experience inclusion, fairness, and recognition as legitimate members⁴². Where these conditions are not met, identification with the national identity may be weakened and, in some cases, extend to disidentification, where individuals actively distance themselves from a national identity^{4,43,44}. Experiences of having one’s distress dismissed or minimised may also shape perceptions of belonging, reinforcing perceptions of being an outsider to the broader community and reducing identification and engagement⁴⁵.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

In the context of antisemitism, narratives of identity and belonging shape whether Jewish individuals and communities are recognised as legitimate members of the national community or positioned as conditionally included or excluded.

Where national identity is constructed in narrow or culturally specific terms, Jewish identity may be framed as incompatible with broader societal values or expectations, contributing to perceptions that Jewish people

do not fully belong. This can manifest in narratives that question loyalty, reinforce outsider status, or position Jewish communities as separate from the national “we”.

2.3.4. Institutional legitimacy, fairness and inclusion

Institutions play a key role in shaping the dynamics as outlined in sections 2.31 – 2.33 through policies and practices, which, in turn, influence social norms and perceptions of legitimacy¹⁰. Crucially, it is perceived legitimacy, rather than formal functioning alone that drives behaviour. When institutions are perceived as fair and inclusive, they strengthen social cohesion. Conversely, when they are viewed as unjust, exclusionary, or unresponsive, individuals may withdraw from broader social participation, reinforcing cycles of division and prejudice⁴³.

Public discourse regarding institutional integrity including concerns about transparency, accountability, and decision-making processes, can shape these perceptions. For example, recent analyses of government integrity arrangements have highlighted issues such as reduced transparency, limitations on scrutiny, and concerns about merit-based appointments⁴⁶. Such analyses form part of the broader information environment in which institutions are interpreted and evaluated. Where institutional processes are perceived as opaque or inconsistent, this may undermine perceptions of procedural fairness and legitimacy⁴⁷.

These issues are experienced unevenly across groups⁴⁸. For minority communities, concerns about fairness may be more salient or more consequential because they interact with belonging, recognition, and safety.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

In the context of antisemitism, perceptions of institutional fairness and legitimacy shape whether Jewish individuals and communities feel protected, recognised, and able to engage confidently with broader social systems. Where institutions are perceived as inconsistent, unresponsive, or unequal in their handling of antisemitism, this can reinforce the sense that Jewish communities are not afforded the same level of protection or recognition as others. This may weaken trust in institutions and reduce confidence in formal mechanisms for addressing antisemitism. Over time, these dynamics can reinforce experiences of exclusion, particularly where concerns about antisemitism are not acknowledged or addressed in a transparent and consistent manner.

2.3.5. Perceived social norms

The processes, as outlined in the previous sections, shape perceived social norms – individuals’ beliefs about which attitudes and behaviours are widely accepted within society. Perceived social norms play a central role in influencing whether individuals express prejudice, engage in cooperative behaviour, or challenge harmful actions⁴⁹.

Importantly, perceived social norms are not always accurate. Misperceptions about the prevalence of hostility or intolerance, termed pluralistic ignorance, can contribute to polarisation⁵⁰. Individuals may overestimate the extent to which negative or exclusionary attitudes are widely held, which can increase conformity to perceived norms and reduce the willingness to challenge harmful views^{51–53}. For example, if individuals overestimate the extent to which discriminatory attitudes are accepted by others, they may be more likely to express or tolerate such views, even where these are not widely endorsed.

Perceived social norms therefore serve as a key mechanism through which broader social and discourse dynamics translate into individual attitudes and behaviours, reinforcing or undermining the conditions that support inclusive belonging and social cohesion.

Implications for antisemitism and social cohesion

When antisemitic attitudes are perceived to be more widely accepted than they are, this can create a distorted sense of consensus, in which hostility appears more normative and opposition less visible. This may discourage individuals from voicing disagreement or expressing support for Jewish communities, even where such views are privately held. These misperceptions can contribute to an environment where antisemitism appears more prevalent and less contested than it is, reinforcing its perceived legitimacy and making it more difficult to challenge within everyday social interactions.

3. Responding to antisemitism and strengthening social cohesion

3.1. Principles for intervention

Effective responses to declining social cohesion require approaches that are grounded in the psychological processes that shape intergroup attitudes and behaviour. As outlined in previous sections, these psychological processes are multi-level, context-dependent, and mutually reinforcing, and include social categorisation, perceived threat and uncertainty, and the influence of social norms and discourse. Interventions that do not address these underlying mechanisms are unlikely to be effective in preventing or reducing discrimination, including antisemitism, and improving social cohesion.

While this submission addresses antisemitism and social cohesion specifically, these underlying drivers operate across multiple forms of intergroup conflict and discrimination, and are best addressed through a broad, social cohesion-focused framework. Put simply, without addressing social cohesion at a systemic level, efforts to reduce antisemitism are likely to have limited impact.

The following principles provide a framework to inform the design and implementation of interventions to strengthen social cohesion and address forms of discrimination, including antisemitism:

- **Mechanism-informed and evidence-based.** Interventions should be grounded in established psychological theory and empirical evidence, with a clear link between the mechanism being targeted (e.g., social categorisation, perceived threat, social norms) and the intended outcome. Ongoing evaluation is critical to assess effectiveness in practice, to adapt approaches, and minimise unintended consequences⁵⁴.
- **Multi-level and system oriented.** The drivers of discrimination, including antisemitism and other negative and harmful intergroup attitudes and behaviours are shaped by interacting influences across individual, community, institutional and societal domains. Coordinated responses across these levels are therefore more likely to be effective than isolated interventions, particularly where dynamics such as social norms, trust, and group identity are mutually reinforcing.
- **Context sensitive and risk aware.** The effectiveness of interventions depends on the social, cultural, and political context in which they are implemented^{6,54}. Approaches that are effective in one context may not generalise to others, particularly where causal evidence is limited.

Interventions should also be designed with careful consideration of potential unintended consequences, including the risk of reinforcing stereotypes, increasing polarisation, or amplifying threat-based narratives.

- **Prevention-focused alongside responsive action.** Long-term strategies that address underlying psychological and social drivers of exclusion and discrimination such as antisemitism are critical for prevention and to provide the foundation to strengthen social cohesion. Concurrently, timely, trauma-informed and responsive measures that recognise the cumulative and enduring psychological impacts associated with ongoing exposure to hostility, threat, uncertainty, and social exclusion are required to minimise harm and support affected individuals and communities.
- **Culturally responsive and inclusive.** Engagement with affected communities in the design and delivery of interventions supports relevance, legitimacy, and effectiveness¹⁰. This includes recognising the specific experiences and impacts of discrimination, including antisemitism, on individuals and communities and ensuring that responses are informed by those directly affected.
- **Informed by psychological expertise.** Psychological science and psychologists have a critical role to play in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions, as well as providing direct support for individuals and communities, and shaping policy and system-level responses. The APS is well positioned to support evidence-informed approaches and provide guidance across sectors.

Recommendation 1

Adopt a principled, psychologically informed and trauma-informed framework to guide the design and implementation of interventions to address discrimination, including antisemitism, and strengthen social cohesion. Responses should recognise the lived experience and cumulative impacts of antisemitism, be targeted to the underlying drivers of intergroup attitudes and behaviour, operate across systems and contexts, and balance prevention with timely and responsive action, informed by engagement with affected communities and psychological expertise.

3.2. Prevention by targeting key psychological mechanisms

The following sections translate the psychological processes outlined in Section 2 into targeted, evidence-based strategies as core components of responses to antisemitism and strengthening social cohesion.

3.2.1. Deconstructing rigid group boundaries and enhancing social integration

The psychological process of social categorisation can foster rigid “us versus them” distinctions, particularly when group boundaries are perceived as fixed or socially significant^{16,17}. As outlined in Section 2.1, these dynamics contribute to stereotyping, exclusion, and the emergence of discrimination including antisemitism through the attribution of fixed, group-based characteristics, intentions, and identities.

Effective responses therefore require interventions that reduce the salience of rigid group boundaries and promote more inclusive and complex understandings of identity to disrupt the categorisation processes that underpin antisemitic attitudes. Psychological research highlights several complementary approaches to achieving this.

Structured, high quality intergroup contact, including contact-based approaches where appropriate, can reduce reliance on stereotypes and support the development of empathy, trust and understanding when

carefully designed and contextually appropriate^{18,55}. However, evidence cautions against relying on incidental proximity, one-off contact, or harmony-focused interaction alone. Contact based approaches are better supported by the evidence where they are sustained⁵⁶, supported by institutions, and designed to include conditions of equal status, cooperation, shared goals, and institutional support^{15,18}, and attention to power, inequality, and lived experience^{57,58}.

This is most effective where programs involve **sustained, cooperative engagement around shared or superordinate goals** rather than one-off or awareness-based activities.

Such approaches enable active collaboration, reduce reliance on indirect or stereotyped information, and shift perceptions from “us versus them” to a more inclusive sense of “we” thereby reducing the likelihood that individuals and communities are perceived through simplified or stereotypical categories^{7,19}.

Encouraging recognition of multiple and cross-cutting identities can further reduce the salience of single group divisions, including those that position identity as singular, fixed, or incompatible with broader social identities, while **reducing social segregation in key settings**, such as education, workplaces, and communities, can increase opportunities for meaningful interaction and reduce reliance on indirect or stereotyped information.

Recommendation 2

Invest in structured, sustained intergroup engagement programs to reduce rigid group boundaries, stereotyping and exclusion. Programs should be designed in line with evidence on effective intergroup conditions, including equal status, cooperation, shared goals, and institutional support from leadership and organisations, with delivery prioritised in settings that enable sustained engagement. Where contact-based approaches are used, they should be contextually appropriate and designed to avoid reliance on incidental proximity, one-off activities, or harmony-focused interaction alone, with explicit attention to power, inequality and lived experience.

3.2.2. Addressing perceived threat and uncertainty

Perceptions of threat, particularly under conditions of uncertainty play a central role in the escalation of intergroup hostility^{33,59}. As outlined in Section 2.2, individuals are more likely to interpret social change, ambiguity, or complexity through a threat-based lens, which can heighten defensive reactions and increase susceptibility to exclusionary attitudes, particularly where individuals or communities are perceived as sources of threat or instability.

Effective responses therefore require interventions that disrupt threat-based interpretations, reduce uncertainty, and address the emotional drivers underpinning these perceptions that contribute to discriminatory attitudes and behaviours such as antisemitism. Psychological research highlights several complementary approaches to achieving this.

Interventions that disrupt the framing of particular groups as threatening, incompatible, or collectively responsible can limit the escalation of intergroup hostility^{33,59}. This includes challenging narratives that exaggerate influence, attribute collective blame, or frame groups as destabilising to social or cultural order, including narratives that portray communities as exerting disproportionate influence or acting against broader societal interests.

Reducing uncertainty through clear, consistent, and contextualised communication is also critical. The delivery of timely, accurate, and high-context information, especially during periods of social, economic

or geopolitical tension can reduce informational ambiguity. This, in turn, limits the tendency for individuals to seek psychological “clarity” through rigid, exclusionary group identifications and reduces the likelihood that complex social changes are interpreted through a threat-based lens, including interpretations that give rise to or reinforce prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs^{2,60,61}.

Finally, emotional responses such as fear, anxiety, and resentment play a central role in shaping hostile intergroup attitudes and behaviours, particularly under conditions of perceived threat^{2,21,24}. These emotions are associated with defensive reactions, including social avoidance, heightened aggression, and support for exclusionary attitudes^{20,24}. **Approaches that reduce these affective responses, including those that promote perspective-taking and empathy**, have been shown to reduce prejudice and improve intergroup attitudes^{62–66}. These interventions function as a psychological buffer, mitigating the emotional precursors to hostility.

In addition, access to psychological support can assist individuals and communities to manage fear, anxiety, and uncertainty in adaptive ways. This reduces the likelihood that these responses are expressed through exclusionary attitudes, while also providing critical trauma-informed support to individuals and communities targeted by prejudice and related discrimination as seen in antisemitism^{8,9}.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen government and institutional communication to challenge threat-based interpretations of social change and issues. Strategies should promote clear, consistent and timely communication, particularly during periods of uncertainty, and counter narratives that place collective blame on, or portray incompatibility between, particular groups.

Recommendation 4

Invest in accessible psychological supports and evidence-informed programs. This should include timely access to appropriate individual and group supports to help manage emotional responses that can contribute to hostile intergroup attitudes and behaviours, and the provision of targeted, trauma-informed support for individuals and communities affected by antisemitism and related exclusion and discrimination; support for Jewish mental health professionals working with their own communities; and support for culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice across the mental health workforce.

3.2.3. Shaping social norms and public discourse

Perceived social norms strongly influence whether individuals express, suppress, or challenge antisemitism and other forms of prejudice. As outlined in Section 2.3, norms communicated through leadership, institutions, and public discourse shape what is understood to be socially acceptable, typical behaviour. When antisemitic or other exclusionary attitudes, including those based on ideology or religion, are perceived to be normal or tolerated, individuals are more likely to express them; clear and consistently reinforced inclusive norms can reduce their expression and spread.

Effective responses therefore require interventions that actively shape social norms, strengthen responsible public discourse, and disrupt the conditions under which harmful narratives, including antisemitism, emerge and spread. Psychological research highlights several complementary approaches to achieving this.

Leadership signalling plays a critical role in modelling inclusive norms and setting expectations for acceptable behaviour. Political, institutional, and community leaders influence not only what is said, but what is perceived to be socially endorsed. Consistent, transparent, and credible communication that emphasises

shared identity, avoids adversarial or exclusionary framing, and explicitly rejects antisemitism and other forms of prejudice can reinforce inclusive norms and build public trust. Psychologists, particularly organisational psychologists, bring expertise in leadership, behaviour change, and organisational culture that can inform the design and delivery of these approaches.

The integrity of the information environment is also central to shaping social norms. The spread of misinformation and disinformation can amplify polarisation, reinforce stereotypes, and normalise harmful narratives, including those that perpetuate stereotypes or conspiratorial claims about individuals and communities. Strategies that support responsible content moderation, improve communication practice, and reduce the spread of misleading information are critical. Psychological science provides insight into how individuals process information, respond to narratives, and form attitudes, and can inform more effective platform and communication strategies.

Disrupting the formation and spread of threat-based narratives is particularly important. Research indicates that once established, such narratives can be resistant to correction and may continue to influence attitudes even after being debunked^{33,59}. This is especially relevant for narratives that attribute collective responsibility, exaggerate influence, or frame communities as socially or culturally destabilising. Interventions that pre-emptively “inoculate” individuals against misinformation, as well as those that provide clear, credible corrections and alternative explanations, can reduce the persistence and impact of these narratives.

Finally, **enhancing media literacy and critical thinking** can strengthen individuals’ capacity to engage with information in a more reflective and less reactive manner. Education and public communication strategies that support critical evaluation of sources, recognition of misleading or manipulative content, and understanding of how narratives are constructed can reduce the influence of misleading information and narratives that amplify division, intergroup hostility, or attitudes such as antisemitism. Psychologists can contribute to the design of evidence-based education and behaviour change strategies in this domain.

Recommendation 5

Strengthen the systems that shape what is seen as normal and acceptable in public discourse.

This should include coordinated, evidence-based strategies to strengthen leadership signalling across political, institutional and community settings; improve the integrity of the information environment by reducing the spread of harmful and misleading content, including antisemitic narratives; and strengthen public capability to critically engage with information.

3.2.4. Strengthening inclusive belonging and national identity

Inclusive constructions of national identity reduce perceived incompatibility between groups and support positive intergroup relations by enabling diverse identities to be recognised as legitimate parts of the broader community. As outlined in Section 2.3.3, when national identity is defined in narrow or exclusionary terms, it can position some groups as outside the boundaries of legitimate belonging, contributing to the marginalisation of minority groups, and increasing vulnerability to discrimination linked to perceptions of non-belonging or conditional acceptance. In contrast, more inclusive conceptions of belonging can strengthen social cohesion and reduce intergroup tension and the conditions under which discriminatory attitudes and exclusion may emerge.

Effective responses therefore require interventions that shape how belonging and national identity are understood, communicated, and enacted across public life to reinforce the legitimacy of identity within the broader national community.

Promoting inclusive narratives of belonging through public messaging, education, and institutional communication can shape shared understandings of who belongs within the national community. Framing national identity in ways that are expansive and inclusive of diverse cultural, religious, and social identities can reduce perceived incompatibility and support a more cohesive sense of “we”, including recognition of diverse groups as a legitimate part of the national fabric.

Supporting dual and multiple identities within a shared national identity is also critical. Enabling individuals to maintain meaningful subgroup identities while also identifying with the broader national community can strengthen belonging and reduce identity conflict. This approach recognises that identification with multiple groups is not inherently contradictory but can instead reinforce both individual and community wellbeing, including for people navigating both religious/cultural and national identities.

Ensuring representation and recognition further reinforces inclusive belonging. Policies and practices that support the visibility, participation, and recognition of diverse communities can strengthen perceptions of legitimacy and inclusion within the broader national identity and reduce the risk of marginalisation or exclusion.

Recommendation 6

Promote inclusive constructions of national identity and belonging. This should include coordinated, evidence-based public communication, education, and public institutional responses that include inclusive narratives of national identity; recognise dual and multiple identities within a shared national framework; and ensure the recognition and representation of diverse communities.

3.2.5. Strengthening institutional trust, fairness, and inclusion

Perceptions of procedural fairness and institutional legitimacy are central to social cohesion and participation. As outlined in Section 2.3.4, individuals are more likely to accept decisions, cooperate with rules, and engage constructively with institutions when they perceive processes to be fair, transparent, and applied consistently. Conversely, perceived bias, inconsistency, or lack of responsiveness can erode trust, reinforce perceptions of exclusion, and reduce confidence that institutions will provide equal protection, including protection from antisemitism and other forms of discrimination.

Effective responses to improve social cohesion therefore require interventions that strengthen procedural fairness, enhance institutional responsiveness, and build trust through inclusive and accountable practices that ensure antisemitism and other forms of discrimination are recognised and addressed consistently and credibly.

Enhancing procedural fairness in decision making is a critical foundation. Transparent, consistent, and impartial processes increase trust in institutions and acceptance of outcomes, even where decisions are unfavourable¹⁰. Ensuring that decision-making processes are clearly communicated and applied equitably can strengthen perceptions of legitimacy and reduce the risk of disengagement or distrust.

Institutional responsiveness is also central to maintaining trust. Timely, consistent, and proportionate responses to incidents of discrimination, including antisemitism, signal that institutions take such issues seriously and uphold principles of inclusion and equal protection¹⁰. Inconsistent or delayed responses can undermine confidence and contribute to perceptions of unequal treatment.

Building trust through inclusive engagement further strengthens institutional legitimacy. Meaningful engagement with diverse communities in policy development, service design, and implementation can enhance perceptions of fairness, increase participation, and ensure that responses are informed by the communities they impact, including Jewish communities affected by antisemitism^{6,67}. Such approaches support more effective and trusted outcomes.

Finally, **monitoring and evaluating institutional responses** supports accountability and continuous improvement. Ongoing evaluation of policies, processes, and outcomes enables institutions to identify gaps, respond to emerging issues, and demonstrate commitment to fairness and inclusion over time. This should include mechanisms for collecting, analysing and reporting data on the prevalence, nature and impacts of antisemitism, as well as evaluation of the effectiveness of prevention and response programs. Consistent and coordinated data collection would support better understanding of affected communities' experiences, identify emerging risks and gaps in institutional responses, and strengthen accountability for policy and service improvement. Psychologists can contribute to the design and evaluation of these systems through expertise in behaviour, perception, and organisational processes.

Recommendation 7

Strengthen institutional trust, fairness and inclusion. This should include coordinated, evidence-based approaches to ensure procedural fairness in decision-making; deliver timely, consistent and proportionate responses to antisemitism and other forms of discrimination; embed inclusive engagement with communities in policy and service design; and strengthen data collection, monitoring and evaluation to support accountability, continuous improvement, and evidence-informed responses.

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