Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria

A Victoria for all of us

State Election Platform 2026

eccv

The Voice of Multicultural Victoria

About ECCV

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) is the independent voice of multicultural Victoria.

As the state peak body for migrant and refugee communities, we represent more than 230 member organisations, including grassroots associations, multicultural service providers and Regional Ethnic Communities' Councils.

Our vision is for a culturally diverse, fair and equitable Victoria — for all.

Since 1974, ECCV has promoted inclusion, strengthened communities and worked to ensure that people from all multicultural backgrounds have the opportunity to fully participate in society. Drawing on decades of experience and strong community relationships, ECCV works with all levels of government to inform policy and improve service delivery.

For more information, please contact ECCV's CEO Farah Farouque at ceo@eccv.org.au or (03) 9354 9555.

ECCV acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and their continuing connection to land, water and community. We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

A Victoria for all of us

ECCV's key priorities for the 2026 Victorian State Election

Victoria's diversity is one of our greatest strengths. But rising racism, unequal access to services and growing demands on community organisations require renewed investment.

Drawing on our extensive statewide community consultations, ECCV is calling on the next Victorian Government to act on five key priorities. **These priorities form part of ECCV's broader platform for a stronger and more inclusive Victoria.**

Back Victoria's independent multicultural peak body

Ensure Victoria's multicultural future with an eight-year funding agreement for ECCV to expand statewide community consultations and build the capacity of the sector. Provide sustainable funding for grassroots community organisations and Regional Ethnic Communities' Councils to further support inclusion and social cohesion across the state.

Eliminate racism and hate

End racism and rising hate in our state, including antisemitism and Islamophobia. Make sustained investments in community-led approaches that prevent racism, support people who experience it and strengthen institutional responses.

Establish *Multicultural Ageing*

Support multicultural older Victorians to age well through *Multicultural Ageing*, a new place-based initiative led by ECCV and launched in six local government areas, complemented by a new Centre of Excellence for Multicultural Ageing based at ECCV.

Build intercultural connection in Melbourne's growth corridors

Champion intercultural connection and promote social cohesion by piloting two Intercultural Hubs in Melbourne's outer suburbs, creating shared spaces where all residents connect across cultures.

Prioritise prevention before punishment

Invest in evidence-based approaches to reduce the overrepresentation of First Nations and culturally diverse people in the youth justice system, including funding for new models such as the Violence Reduction Unit's early intervention and prevention initiative.

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CEO's introduction

The 2026 Victorian State Election comes at a critical time for our multicultural state. Victoria's multicultural communities contribute enormously to our economy, society and culture. Their voices — and votes — matter. Yet a growing number of people are feeling less secure about their place in our democracy. Cost-of-living pressures are placing strain on individuals and families, while racism and anti-migrant rhetoric are being expressed more openly than ever.

This is a test for our political culture and the parties who aspire to govern. The next Victorian Government must make strategic investments that strengthen multicultural communities and ensure our state's extraordinary diversity remains one of our greatest assets.

For more than 50 years, ECCV has listened closely to communities across Victoria. Over the past year, during our statewide consultations, we heard from hundreds of community members who spoke frankly about the challenges they face and their hopes for their families and communities.

Young people told us they need greater opportunities. Families spoke about the need for stronger supports. Older Victorians told us they want to age with dignity and respect. Across generations and communities, a common message stood out: belonging matters.

Belonging is the foundation for social cohesion, but it does not happen by accident. It is built through political leadership, investment and an ongoing commitment to ensuring that everyone can participate and contribute to our state.

ECCV's Election Platform calls on the next Victorian Government to invest in the people, services and community organisations that make this possible. It sets out practical recommendations to address growing racism and how to ensure people of all ages can thrive, along with the multicultural organisations that back them

The 14 recommendations in this platform provide a practical roadmap for a Victoria that is stronger and more resilient. And when all of us are truly included, our whole state benefits.

Farah Farouque
ECCV CEO

Executive summary

Victoria is undeniably one of the world's most successful multicultural societies. People from 300 cultural backgrounds, speaking 290 languages and dialects and following more than 200 faiths, help power our economy, strengthen our communities and enrich our cultural life. Our diversity is one of our greatest assets and a defining feature of our state.

But strong multicultural communities do not happen by chance. They are anchored by strong community organisations, thriving local businesses, accessible services, genuine participation and policies that ensure everyone can contribute and belong.

As Victoria continues to grow and diversify, new challenges are emerging. The surge in anti-migrant sentiment, antisemitism and Islamophobia is undermining trust and social cohesion. Multicultural communities are also experiencing barriers to accessing services, unmet health needs and unequal access to infrastructure and opportunities amid cost-of-living pressures. Community organisations are increasingly being called on to respond to these challenges while operating with limited resources.

The 2026 Victorian State Election is an opportunity to invest in a Victoria where people from all cultural backgrounds can participate, contribute and flourish.

Drawing on extensive community consultations across the state and priorities identified through our annual member survey, this platform sets out 14 practical recommendations, categorised under four areas for action: sustain communities, invest in belonging, support every generation and strengthen wellbeing and safety.

Our recommendations aim to strengthen multicultural organisations, boost culturally responsive services, eliminate racism and build a stronger, more inclusive Victoria — for all of us.

Four areas of action. 14 recommendations. Together, ECCV's recommendations provide a practical roadmap for the next Victorian Government.

> “Building social cohesion and restoring trust will require ongoing effort, cultural competence within institutions, and a clear dedication to collaborating with Victoria’s multicultural and multifaith communities.”
>
> — Victorian Multicultural Review (2025)

Sustain communities

Support ECCV as the independent peak body for multicultural Victorians

For more than 50 years, the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria (ECCV) has been the member-based peak body for culturally diverse Victorians, representing migrant and refugee communities and providing a non-partisan voice on issues affecting multicultural Victoria. ECCV's independence, underpinned by stable, long-term investment from successive governments, enables communities to engage openly and ensures government receives trusted, evidence-based advice.

Victoria's multicultural population has grown significantly, and ECCV's role has grown with it. In addition to providing policy advice and supporting more than 230 member organisations, ECCV is increasingly called upon to undertake community consultations, respond to emerging issues and deliver statewide initiatives.

The Victorian Government has provided ECCV with core funding since the 1980s, with the current funding agreement expiring in 2026–27. Long-term funding is needed to retain skilled staff, preserve institutional and community knowledge and provide consistent, independent advice to government.

An eight-year funding agreement would provide the certainty needed for ECCV to continue its core role while expanding community engagement and sector capacity building work across Victoria. This would include:

- convening regular metropolitan and regional multicultural community roundtables to identify emerging issues, advise on policy priorities and, importantly, inform government on multicultural community sentiment; and
- expanding a capacity-building program to support at least 150 grassroots multicultural community groups to enhance their governance, improve understanding of government systems and processes and develop grant-writing and fundraising skills to improve sustainability and community outcomes.

Recommendation:

Commit to an eight-year core funding agreement for ECCV. As Victoria's independent and trusted multicultural peak body, the organisation requires secure, increased core funding to expand statewide engagement, strengthen community partnerships and support social cohesion.

Support regional organisations

Regional Ethnic Communities' Councils (RECCs) are valuable local services, ensuring multicultural communities across regional and rural Victoria are connected, supported and well represented.

The role of RECCs has become more important as federal funding for settlement services in regional Victoria has declined. With more migrants and refugees moving to regional communities, support has not kept pace with demand. In many areas, RECCs are stepping in to fill these gaps.

Last year's Victorian Multicultural Review[1] recognised the importance of RECCs and highlighted the need for regional communities to have access to trusted, locally based organisations that can represent their interests and foster social cohesion.

Recommendation:

Provide sustainable funding for Regional Ethnic Communities' Councils (RECCs) to strengthen multicultural services and support social cohesion in regional and rural Victoria.

Develop the capability of the multicultural sector

Local community-based organisations are the foundation of Victoria's multicultural sector. Trusted by communities, they provide support, create belonging, improve health and wellbeing and reduce social isolation. They are critical for social cohesion and help government engage effectively with communities.

Despite their importance, many organisations are volunteer-led or operate with limited resources, making it difficult to meet increasing demand. At the same time, governance, compliance and service delivery requirements can make it challenging for small organisations to compete for funding. Many are being asked to do more while relying on short term or insecure funding and without the organisational capacity needed for long-term sustainability. ECCV notes the Productivity Commission's recommendation to establish a five-year minimum baseline for default government contract lengths when funding community organisations.[2]

The Victorian Multicultural Review identified organisational capability as critical to a strong and sustainable multicultural sector. Ongoing investment through targeted multicultural grants - such as the Multicultural Capacity Building Program – is a cost-effective investment that will enable local organisations to better support their communities.

Recommendation:

Provide ongoing and increased funding through the Multicultural Capacity Building Program, or a similar initiative, for community-based multicultural organisations.

> “Interculturalism focuses on fostering interaction between different cultural groups and the benefits that are produced in dialogue, exchange and collaboration for social resilience.”

— Professor Andrew Jakubowicz, cultural diversity expert

Invest in belonging

Eliminate racism

Racism and discrimination emerged as the priority concern for multicultural Victorians in ECCV's recent statewide consultations. Systemic racism creates barriers to employment, education, housing, healthcare and other services, with harmful impacts on health, wellbeing, safety and participation.

Racism remains a significant challenge. One in three people from non-English speaking backgrounds report experiencing discrimination because of their skin colour, ethnicity or religion, compared with one in six Australians overall.[3] Reports of racial hatred have increased nationally, while research suggests racism remains significantly underreported, meaning the true scale of the problem is likely much greater.[4] A recent surge in antisemitism and Islamophobia incidents in our state reinforces that no community should live in fear because of their faith, culture or identity.

The responsibility to eliminate racism does not lie with those who experience it. Victoria has established a strong foundation through its Anti-Racism Strategy 2024–2029, but delivering its ambitions will require sustained investment in initiatives that prevent racism, support people affected by racism and strengthen institutional responses.

Community support: Anti-Racism Support Networks

Three pilot Anti-Racism Support Networks in Wyndham, Whittlesea and Melbourne's southeast (Casey, Greater Dandenong and Cardinia) have demonstrated the effectiveness of community-led support for people experiencing racism.

An independent evaluation found that the networks successfully operated as local anti-racism support and reporting hubs. However, the cessation of State Government funding has limited their capacity to continue this work. Renewed funding for existing networks and expansion into new areas would improve access to culturally safe support and strengthen local responses to racism.

Local prevention: Local Anti-Racism Initiative grants

Local Anti-Racism Initiative (LARI) grants have supported local councils, multicultural organisations and community groups to develop and test practical, place-based responses to racism. These partnerships have built local leadership, strengthened community relationships and increased local capacity to address racism as reports of racism and hate increase.

Guaranteed annual funding rounds over four years would enable communities to scale local initiatives while supporting the prevention and community partnership objectives of Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy.

Preventing racism in schools

Racism can have significant impacts on young people's wellbeing, sense of belonging and participation at school.

ECCV's community consultations have identified increasing experiences of racism among children and young people from multicultural backgrounds, which participants told us have sometimes been miscategorised as bullying. With multicultural young people from 156 countries making up around half of Victoria's youth population[5], schools play a vital role in creating belonging and responding to racism.

Programs like Schools Standing Up to Racism, a practical resource developed by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre's youth-led ambassador initiative Project Merahi, help schools tackle racism. Additional investment would enable such initiatives to help more students experiencing racism.

Recommendation:

Invest in a comprehensive anti-racism package that:

- establishes five new Anti-Racism Support Networks in additional Local Government Areas, including regional Victoria, while providing ongoing funding for existing networks
- funds annual Local Anti-Racism Initiative (LARI) grant rounds over the next four years to expand locally led anti-racism initiatives
- expands anti-racism programs in Victorian schools.

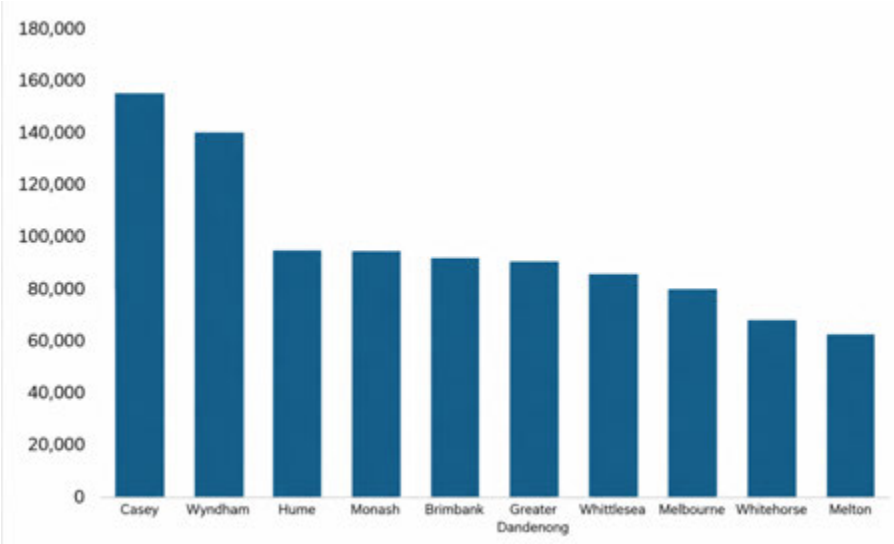
Fund Intercultural Hubs in Melbourne's growth corridors

Half of Victorians were either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas.[6] In recognition of our incredible diversity, more strategic investment is needed to strengthen relationships between communities.

Multicultural policy is designed to nurture identity, promote cultural diversity, support settlement and foster social cohesion. Intercultural engagement is a practical approach to multiculturalism that encourages genuine connection, trust and resilience in our communities.

Melbourne's growth corridors in the outer north, west and southeast are among the fastest growing and most culturally diverse parts of Victoria. But cost-of-living pressures and other challenges can limit participation in community life, increasing the need for accessible, local spaces where communities can connect with each other.

Top 10 Victorian local government areas (LGAs) with the highest overseas-born population

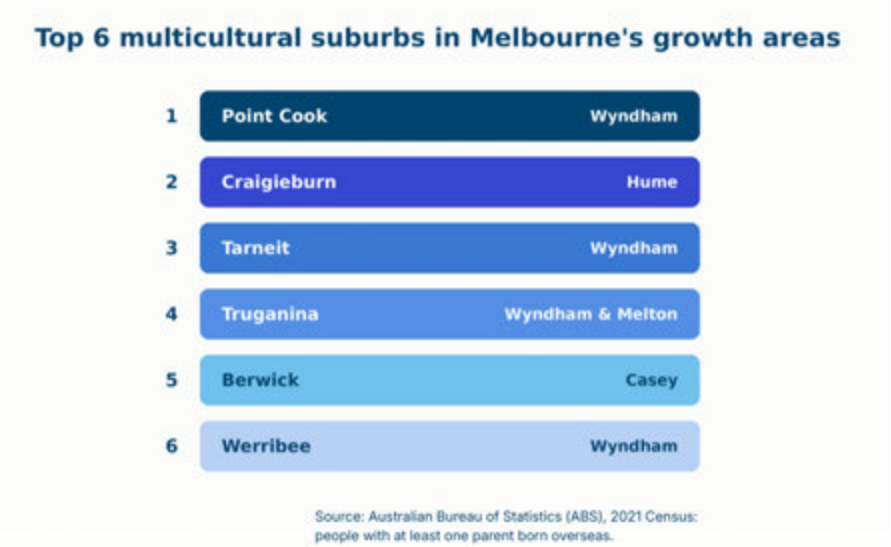


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021)[7]

Underutilised public and government-owned buildings provide an opportunity for communities to develop shared intercultural spaces that respond to local needs.

ECCV's new proposal builds on models such as Millennium House, a multicultural community hub established by Australian Multicultural Community Services (AMCS). Intercultural Hubs would extend this approach by promoting greater interaction and collaboration between communities.

The Victorian Government should identify two growth corridors and fund local communities to consult on and co-design the model, including the activities and governance of each centre. ECCV would facilitate this process, bringing together local multicultural organisations, councils, community leaders and other stakeholders to develop the plan.



Recommendation:

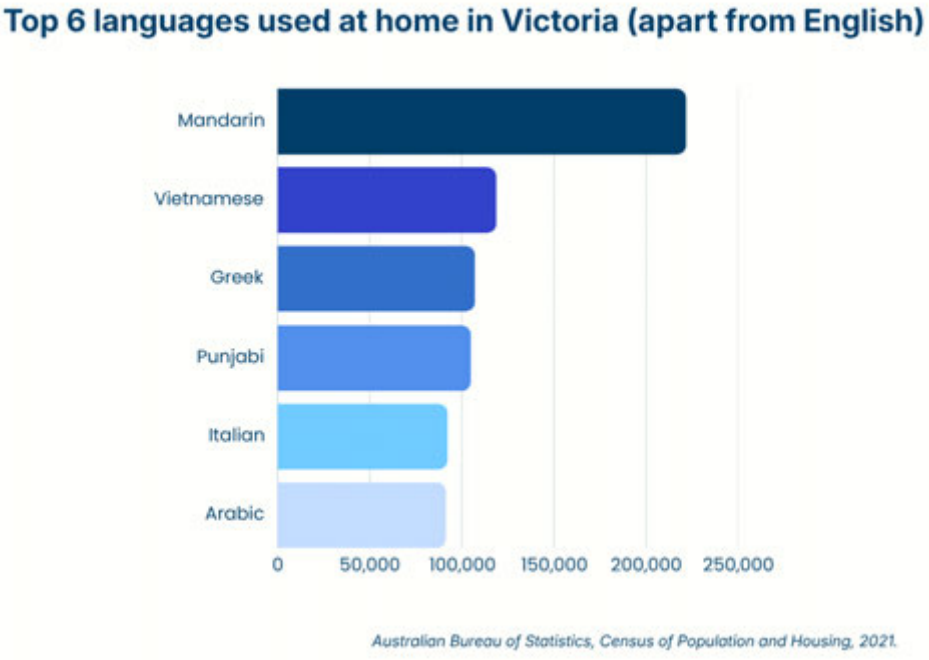
Commit to a pilot of two Intercultural Hubs in Melbourne's growth corridors, beginning with a funded, community-led consultation and co-design process facilitated by ECCV.

Revitalise language education

Language learning is central to identity, belonging and participation in a diverse society.

When children can speak, read and write the home language of their parents or main carer, it strengthens their sense of identity and belonging. It also supports literacy, cognitive development and educational achievement. Promoting language learning from an early age helps children build bilingual skills that can benefit them through life.[8]

Victoria has long been a leader in language education, but multicultural communities continue to raise concerns about gaps in provision of family and heritage languages. The lack of Vietnamese language programs at primary level in several western suburbs, where Vietnamese is the most spoken language after English, is a striking example of an unmet need.



Strengthening multilingual primary education will improve outcomes for children and help develop the next generation of bilingual and bicultural professionals. As demand grows across health, education, aged care and other essential services, investing in language education now will help build the skilled workforce Victoria needs for the future.

Recommendation:

Reaffirm the principles of Australia's National Policy on Languages and revitalise language education in government primary schools. This should include reinforcing minimum expectations for language instruction and expanded access in underserved communities, with programs better matched to local demographics.

> “When people grow up in environments shaped by hate, bias, or exclusion, it can influence who they become.”

— Yusra, Spectrum Migrant Resource Centre Youth Ambassador

Support every generation

Establish *Multicultural Ageing*

Victoria's population is becoming both older and more culturally diverse.

Many older people from migrant and refugee backgrounds face barriers to ageing well. This includes social isolation, limited awareness of services and difficulty navigating complex aged care, health and legal systems, alongside language barriers. These factors can delay access to support, increase vulnerability to elder abuse and reduce opportunities to remain connected, healthy and independent.

A stronger coordinated local approach is urgently needed to connect multicultural seniors, local councils and services, build on local expertise and community strengths to ensure multicultural older people can truly thrive in their communities.

ECCV has 50 years of leadership in multicultural ageing and over a decade of experience delivering culturally responsive elder abuse awareness and prevention. A proposed new *Multicultural Ageing* initiative would build on this expertise to provide a coordinated, community-led model that strengthens elder abuse prevention and early intervention while helping multicultural older Victorians live safely, independently and with dignity.

The initiative, leveraging existing state government investment, would initially be established across six local government areas identified in metropolitan and regional Victoria. In each area, ECCV will work on the ground with multicultural seniors' groups, the local council, multicultural organisations, bicultural workers, mainstream services and older community members to identify challenges and priorities and develop practical solutions through community-led action plans.

A statewide Centre of Excellence for Multicultural Ageing, based at ECCV, would complement this place-based work through research, policy development, workforce capability, evaluation and knowledge sharing, ensuring local learning informs statewide ageing policy.

Recommendation:

Launch *Multicultural Ageing*, a place-based initiative led by ECCV to support multicultural older Victorians to age well in six local government areas, and a new statewide Centre of Excellence for Multicultural Ageing.

> “We now have more faiths, cultures and languages represented in our seniors community than ever before.”

— Dilnaz Billimoria, 2025 Victorian Seniors Award recipient

Strengthen relationships between the generations

Multicultural families bring strong cultural knowledge, care and resilience to raising children. However, intergenerational tension is a common feature of family life. This can be compounded by cultural differences and the challenges of migration and settlement. Families can benefit from practical tools and support to navigate differences around culture, identity and belonging that may emerge across generations.[9]

Through facilitated dialogue, shared learning and a curriculum of creative activities, a new intergenerational family program, *Generations Together*, would create supportive spaces for parents, caregivers and young people to build communication skills, explore cultural identity and deepen mutual understanding.

This pilot program, developed in response to direct community feedback, would strengthen family wellbeing through an early intervention and prevention lens. Funding would enable grassroots community organisations to co-design, test and evaluate an adaptive program and practical resources, guided by ECCV.

Recommendation:

Funding for a new pilot program, *Generations Together*, to strengthen relationships between multicultural parents, caregivers and young people by promoting family wellbeing and resilience.

Extend free public transport for young people

The cost of public transport is a significant barrier for many multicultural young people, limiting their ability to access education, training, employment and other services.

Young people increasingly remain in secondary education, vocational training and higher education beyond the age of 18 and rely on public transport to attend classes, apprenticeships, work placements, job interviews, casual employment and more.

Extending free public transport for young people aged up to 21 would ease cost-of-living pressures for young people and their families and remove a practical barrier to further education, training and employment. ECCV also strongly endorses continued public transport investment in Melbourne's growth corridors and regional areas with limited services.

Recommendation:

Extend free public transport for young Victorians to age 21 to improve access to education, training, employment and community participation.

> “Multiculturalism is a social reality that can never be ignored or diminished. Multicultural Victorians deserve respect, inclusion and support in our communities.”

— George Lekakis AO, ECCV Life Member

Strengthen wellbeing and safety

Invest in multicultural mental health

Mental health consistently emerges as one of the most significant issues facing migrant and refugee communities. People often report difficulty navigating services, long wait times and limited access to culturally appropriate care.[10]

ECCV welcomes the *Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework 2025–2035*, which recognises the unique needs of multicultural Victorians in accessing quality care. A key focus is partnering with community-led organisations and embedding them in the design, delivery and evaluation of mental health services and programs.[11]

Multicultural organisations have deep community trust, cultural expertise and established relationships that can help connect people with appropriate supports. However, these organisations are often engaged on a short-term basis rather than as equal partners in the mental health system. Long-term investment would enable sustained partnerships with mainstream mental health services, Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals, hospitals and Primary Health Networks, supporting integrated referral pathways, shared care models and coordinated community outreach.

Embedding multicultural organisations as genuine partners would improve early intervention and help build a more accessible and culturally responsive mental health system.

Recommendation:

Invest in partnerships between grassroots multicultural organisations and mainstream mental health services in line with the Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework 2025–2035.

Prevent gambling harm

Victorians lost over $7.3 billion to gambling in the 2024–25 financial year, with poker machines (also known as EGMs) accounting for the largest share at $3.1 billion.[12]

Gambling harm can devastate individuals, families and communities, causing financial, social and mental health impacts. Evidence suggests that while multicultural communities gamble less overall than the general population, they are overrepresented among people experiencing problem gambling.[13] Multicultural communities can face additional barriers to prevention and support, including language, low awareness of services, stigma and a lack of culturally responsive information.

ECCV has led culturally responsive action on gambling harm through education, community engagement and capacity-building. This has included developing multilingual resources, training bicultural workers and community champions, and improving awareness of support pathways.

Investment in culturally responsive gambling harm prevention would enable multicultural organisations to lead local education, early intervention and capacity-building. A place-based approach should target the local government areas with the highest gambling losses: Brimbank, Casey, Whittlesea, Hume and Greater Geelong, which are also among the state's most culturally diverse communities.

Sustained investment would reduce stigma, strengthen community protection, improve access to support and ensure gambling harm prevention reaches at-risk communities.

Recommendation:

Fund a two-year culturally tailored gambling harm prevention initiative across five priority local government areas, delivered by local multicultural and ethno-specific organisations.

Prevention before punishment

Multicultural young people make essential contributions to Victoria's social, cultural and economic life. Yet some groups are overrepresented in the youth justice system due to a complex range of social, economic and structural factors. Effective responses must be community-led, developed in genuine partnership with communities and delivered by trusted organisations and mentors who understand the cultural contexts, strengths and lived experiences of the young people they support.

Victoria should continue to invest in and strengthen evidence-based, community-led early intervention models that address the underlying drivers of youth offending. This includes building on the principles underpinning initiatives such as the Violence Reduction Unit by expanding culturally responsive, place-based approaches delivered in partnership with First Nations and multicultural communities, trusted organisations and community mentors. Sustained investment in prevention reduces future demand on the justice system and delivers better outcomes for young people, families and communities.

In Victoria, detaining one young person costs more than $2.6 million per year.[14] While youth offending remains a matter of significant public concern, evidence shows that prevention and early intervention are more cost-effective than punitive responses.[15] These approaches improve community safety while helping build more cohesive communities.

Consistent with evidence, ECCV joins the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, the Australian Medical Association and a range of organisations in the legal and welfare sectors in calling for the minimum age of criminal responsibility to be raised to 14.

Recommendation:

Commit to sustained investment in evidence-based early intervention and prevention that reduces the overrepresentation of multicultural and First Nations young people in the justice system by:

- Investing in initiatives such as the Violence Reduction Unit
- Raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14.

Bolster refugee health

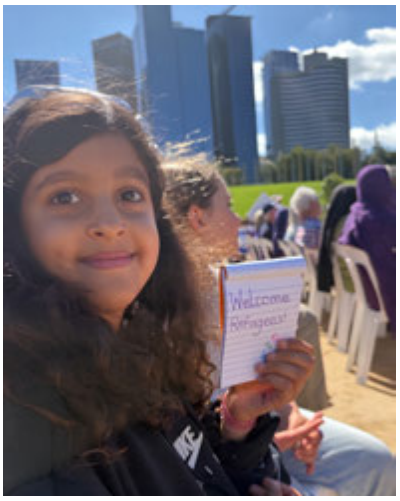
Refugees and people seeking asylum often have complex physical and mental health needs, while facing language barriers and challenges navigating an unfamiliar health system. Victoria's Refugee Health Program provides early, community-based support through refugee health nurses, allied health professionals and bicultural workers.

Demand is growing, but access to culturally responsive refugee health support remains fragmented, particularly in regional and growth areas.[16]

Long-term investment would expand the program into growth areas, strengthen the bicultural workforce, improve continuity of care and reduce pressure on hospitals through earlier intervention and better system navigation.

Recommendation:

Provide enhanced, long-term funding for Victoria's Refugee Health Program to expand access in growth areas, strengthen workforce capacity and ensure newly arrived refugees and people seeking asylum receive timely, culturally responsive health care and system navigation support.



Support the next generation of bicultural workers

Bicultural workers play a vital role in Victoria's community services, using language skills and deep cultural knowledge to build trust, improve access and support better outcomes across health, mental health, aged care, disability, family violence, settlement and other services. Their value was particularly evident during Victoria's COVID-19 response.

As Victoria becomes more diverse, demand for bicultural workers is growing, but the workforce remains under-recognised and lacks consistent recruitment, training and career pathways. There is no standardised, accredited training pathway that recognises the specific capabilities of bicultural workers, limiting professional recognition, creating uncertainty for employers and contributing to inconsistent workforce standards.

ECCV's *Building Our Bicultural Workforce*[17] report identifies accredited training as a key solution and recommends government work with the vocational education and training sector, multicultural organisations and service providers to develop a recognised qualification. This would strengthen workforce capability, improve service quality and support the delivery of culturally responsive services across Victoria.

Recommendation:

Invest in the creation of a standardised, accredited qualification for bicultural workers to work in the provision of community services.

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