

25th January 2023

Treasurer  
The Hon Jim Chalmers MP  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600 Dear Minister,

## 2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission

Dear Minister

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission regarding the 2023-24 Federal pre-budget priorities.

### **Targeted investment in young people is critical for Australia's prosperity.**

This submission provides recommendations for targeted socio-economic responses and culturally specific interventions to address the impacts of the cost of living and systemic issues of concern for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who are still recovering from the socio-economic and health and wellbeing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendations in this paper are based on youth consultations and previous MYAN reports. We call on the Federal Government to urgently commit funds in the following key areas:

- Income support
- Mental Health
- Digital Literacy
- Youth specific settlement support

### **Summary of recommendations**

1. Lift social security payments to above the poverty line and by at least \$73 in line with recommendations put forward by the Australian Council of Social Services.

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2. Establish an advisory committee to report on the adequacy of Centrelink payments prior to each federal budget.

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3. Direct the Department of Home Affairs to review and expand the eligibility criteria that restricts access to SRSS for people seeking asylum who are at risk of destitution and homelessness.

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4. Align payment rates for income support under the Status Resolution Support Services program with the standard Centrelink payment rates.

5. Grant people seeking asylum a national concession card equivalent to those of Low Income Health Care Card holders.

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6. Abolish or reduce the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period.

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7. Reinstate the 10 additional visits to a mental health professional subsidised by Medicare

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8. Increase funding for tele-health or tele-psychiatry for young people in rural and remote areas that have limited access to onsite mental health specialists and Increase funding for professional phone interpreters for mental health sessions with young people who have English as an Additional Language.

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9. Invest in a national best practice framework around mental health service provision for migrant and refugee-background young people, with consultation and co-design from young people, their families and communities.

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10. Provide recurrent funding for mental health literacy resources and programs aimed and refugee and migrant-background young people and their communities (e.g. – youth-led peer support programs, community engagement, etc.).

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11. Invest in long-term research around the efficacy of mental health policies and services in meeting the needs of refugee and migrant-background young people.

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12. Include appropriate digital technology in the Basic Household Goods Package, provided as part of the Humanitarian Settlement Program – such as laptops and a phone for more than one family member, with an appropriate data allowance for a period of time.

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13. Embed in-language digital mentoring in settlement services.

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14. Invest in ICT infrastructure in regional areas.

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15. Invest in more public Wi-Fi ‘hotspots’.

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16. Invest in a National Youth Settlement Strategy.

### **About this submission**

This submission has a focus on young people (aged 12-24) from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Australia’s multicultural youth population is an integral and important contributor to the social and economic fabric of the Australian community and make up almost half (47%) of Australia’s youth population.

MYAN believes that Australia’s migration program is a critical factor in the strength and prosperity of Australia, and we welcome the positive focus on migration in the October 2022 budget. However, in order to maximise the benefits of migration, it is essential that settlement policy and program settings are optimised to promote inclusion, independence and economic participation, including for more newly arrived young people.

We know that young people are keen to participate in and contribute to the decision-making processes on issues that affect them. We were pleased to see that the second budget for 2022-23

takes some positive steps towards involving more young people in decision making at the highest level. MYAN affirms the importance of recognising and building on young people's strengths and capabilities, and working with them as partners in service planning and delivery.

We call on the Federal Government to ensure the upcoming budget includes an intentional, and central focus on the experiences, concerns, and hopes of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, in recognition of the key role they play in the imagining of Australia's future, and their vital role in current economic recovery and contributions to a strong and unified multicultural Australia.

Further, we encourage the government to address longstanding inequalities and disadvantage for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to ensure that all of Australia's young people can access meaningful and equitable opportunities for social, economic and civic participation.

Against a backdrop of COVID-19 recovery, rising costs of living, low wages and major housing issues, and the impact this is having on wellbeing, this is a crucial time to work with young people to install a vision of a future that they feel hopeful and confident in.

Economic shocks can impair healthy adolescent development and disrupt settlement, and targeted investment is needed to prevent negative long-term consequences. Furthermore, settlement services play a central role in assisting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face these particular challenges and adjust to life in Australia, and a targeted approach in youth settlement support is the most effective way to capitalise on their strengths, address their particular needs, and ensure they are able to realise their full potential.

Yours faithfully,



Carmel Guerra, OAM  
Chairperson

### **About MYAN**

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN) is an advocacy non-profit peak body that provides advice to the government and capacity building to those who work with young people. Since our formal inception in 2007, we have been working in partnership with young people, government, and civil society to promote the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and ensure these are recognised in policy and practice. We facilitate national connections between young people, academics, policy makers and practitioners, provide policy expertise, youth leadership opportunities, and develop capacity building resources.

### **Acknowledgment**

MYAN acknowledges the traditional custodians upon the lands on which we work. We acknowledge that Sovereignty was never seeded and recognise that this land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal Land. We work towards reconciliation with, and self-determination for the First Peoples of this country.

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## 1. Income support

Income support has a crucial role in modern societies by providing critical safety nets to prevent chronic destitution, and are an important avenue to strengthening a weakening economy.<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic clearly demonstrated both the benefits, and challenges, in Australia's existing social security system. With rental prices, energy bills and inflation all climbing, and wage growth stagnant, the cost of living crisis is a critical issue for young people from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds who face additional barriers to meaningful employment and access to income support.

MYAN believes that financial assistance should be based on need, regardless of what stage a person is at in their visa determination process. We saw during the COVID-19 pandemic that well-funded and accessible social security policy can change lives. In no circumstances should people be deliberately left without the economic safety nets afforded to others on low incomes. We recommend an immediate review of income support policies and investment into income support. We cannot justify policies that keep people living below the poverty line.

## Key issues

### 1. Income support

MYAN was pleased to see the recent announcement that young people, carers and students will have their income support payments boosted by up to \$20 a week in recognition of the cost of living crisis. However, while we acknowledge that this increase is the most substantial indexation since the welfare measure was brought in in 1998, the increase means that a single person living away from home receiving Austudy will receive \$281.40 per week - **\$207.60 below the current Australian poverty line.**<sup>2</sup>

Poverty and protracted financial hardship has detrimental and long-lasting impacts in terms of settlement, integration and mental health. MYAN remains concerned that income support payments across the board, including the level of income support available to asylum seekers living in the community on Bridging Visas, remains insufficient to ensure the adequate standard of living needed to mitigate the current cost of living crisis and ensure that young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds can meet the costs of basic necessities like food and toiletries, utilities, rent and the costs associated with looking for work.

Multiple reports indicate that lowering income inequality is a sound investment that will improve economic growth and measures.<sup>13</sup> For example, accounting firm KPMG has noted that income support payments are too low, and that an increase in income support would actually boost the economy by stimulating spending, particularly in regional areas, as income support recipients "spend,

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<sup>1</sup> ACOSS (2020) *Next Steps for Income Support* Available at: <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Social-security-next-steps-JUL-UPDATED-2-9-copy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> ACOSS (2022) *Poverty in Australia: A snapshot* Available at: <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au>

rather than save, almost all they receive.”<sup>3</sup> Economists at Deloitte Access Economics estimate that increasing Newstart by just \$75 per week<sup>15</sup> would boost GDP in Australia by \$4 billion.<sup>4</sup>

#### Recommendations:

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1. Lift social security payments to above the poverty line and by at least \$73 in line with recommendations put forward by the Australian Council of Social Services.
2. Establish an advisory committee to report on the adequacy of Centrelink payments prior to each federal budget.

#### 1.2 Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS)

We also remain deeply concerned about the thousands of individuals and families, including children and young people who remain impacted by changes to the Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) brought in by the previous government. The changes, which saw the SRSS budget cut by 85%, has left asylum seekers who have been waiting years for the government to resolve their immigration status living in protracted financial hardship and poverty as they are no longer eligible for the program.

While we welcome the government’s investment into processing the historical visa backlog, and acknowledge a record number of visas have been processed since the new government took office, thousands of people remain wholly dependent on under-resourced charities just to survive, exposing them to homelessness, poor mental and physical health, and poor settlement outcomes.<sup>5</sup>

#### Recommendations:

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3. Direct the Department of Home Affairs to review and expand the eligibility criteria that restricts access to SRSS for people seeking asylum who are at risk of destitution and homelessness.
4. Align payment rates for income support under the Status Resolution Support Services program with the standard Centrelink payment rates.

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<sup>3</sup> KPMG (2019) *Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs Adequacy of Newstart and related payments and alternative mechanisms to determine the level of income support payments in Australia* Available at: [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/Newstartrelatedpayments](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/Newstartrelatedpayments)

<sup>4</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2018) *Analysis of the impact of raising benefit rates* Available at: <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/DAE-Analysis-of-the-impact-of-raising-benefit-rates-FINAL-4-September>

<sup>5</sup> Keck, M (2019) *30,000 Asylum Seekers in Australia at Risk of Homelessness and Poverty: Report* Global Citizen, July 23<sup>rd</sup>. Available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/asylum-seekers-in-australia-at-risk-of-poverty/>

### 1.3 Concessions

Permanent Australian residents on low incomes or in receipt of Centrelink payments generally receive discounts for essential items and services like utilities and public transport. They are also able to access concession schemes for adult education and training through the issue of a concession card ('health care card', 'low income health care card' or 'concession card'). These concessions are provided in specific recognition of the individual's economic constraints.

Though many asylum seekers receiving financial support subsist on just 89% of the Centrelink unemployment benefit<sup>6</sup> they are not entitled to the same concession benefits as Australian residents on low incomes. This means they must, in many parts of Australia, pay full price for essential commodities like electricity and public transport and other vital services, which contributes to acute financial distress.<sup>7</sup> While many concession schemes are legislated through states and territories we recommend a national concession card scheme commensurate with other low income concessions across Australia be implemented for asylum seekers in Australia while their visa applications are being processed to provide some financial relief and relieve pressure on the emergency services and charitable sectors.

#### Recommendation:

5. Grant people seeking asylum a national concession card equivalent to those of Low Income Health Care Card holders.

### 1.4 Waiting periods

MYAN oppose the four-year waiting period for new migrants to access most Government welfare payments. This is particularly concerning for young people who are on 117/115 visas, as well as families and carers who will be left without this critical support when it is most needed, during their initial settlement period. Newly-arrived young people and families settling in Australia often need immediate support – waiting four years to access this support at such a critical time only serves to further marginalise new migrants.

#### **Recommendation:**

1. Abolish or reduce the Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period

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<sup>6</sup> Australian Red Cross (2017) *Falling through the gaps: the experiences of people living in Australia on uncertain visa pathways.*

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## 2. Youth mental health support

The current Australian mental health system is not perceived or experienced by many young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds as culturally relevant or safe, and is failing to meet their needs.

**Adolescence is the peak time of onset for many mental health disorders.**<sup>8</sup> Though half of all mental illnesses appear before the age of 14 and three-quarters by the age of 25, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact the mental health of young people across Australia, young people in Australia still face barriers to appropriate mental health care, including considerable gaps in services, costs, long waits, limited services in rural and regional areas and often a lack of continuity of care.<sup>9</sup>

Refugee and migrant-background young people make up a significant portion of the youth cohort – in Australia, 25% of people aged 15-25 were born overseas. Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds face additional mental health risks to the general youth population, as well as structural barriers to accessing the support they need. For example, traumatic migration experiences, racism and discrimination, the stress and uncertainty of seeking asylum, and the resettlement process can contribute to poorer mental health, and experiences of trauma will shape the type of care young people need and how it is delivered. Multicultural young people, families and communities may also hold understandings of mental health, illness, and recovery that are shaped by cultural and religious views which may differ to clinical approaches used in Australia.

Although there is minimal research on the mental health of young people from refugee backgrounds, literature suggests higher rates of psychiatric disorders amongst this group compared with the adult population, and highlights that they also face a high risk of suicide.<sup>11</sup> The Building a New Life in Australia study revealed that young people from humanitarian backgrounds have much higher levels of psychological stress – 31% of young men and 37% of young women – than the general youth population in Australia<sup>12</sup>.

Despite this, **there are lower than expected numbers of young people from migrant, refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds presenting to mental health services.** In the context of Australia, children and young people generally have relatively low levels of service usage (despite high levels of mental health issues), while refugee children and young people have even lower rates of utilisation of mental health services compared with young people more broadly. This can significantly impact their settlement outcomes. Untreated mental illness can result in impaired social functioning, poor

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<sup>8</sup> Orygen (2018) Youth mental health service models and approaches Considerations for primary care. Available at: <https://www.orygen.org.au/About/Service-Development/Youth-Enhanced-Services-National-Programs/Primary-Health-Network-resources/Youth-mental-health-service-models-and-approaches/Youth-mental-health-service-models-and-approaches?ext=>

<sup>9</sup> Mental Health Victoria (2021) 2021 Federal Budget Submission Available at: [https://www.mhvic.org.au/images/documents/Submission\\_and\\_Documents/MHV\\_Federal\\_Budget\\_Submission\\_2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.mhvic.org.au/images/documents/Submission_and_Documents/MHV_Federal_Budget_Submission_2021_final.pdf)



educational achievement, self-harm, suicide and violence. Mental health issues are also estimated to cost the Australian economy \$12 billion annually, due to workplace disengagement.<sup>10</sup>

Adolescent development and the transition to adulthood experienced in Australia, together with the challenge of resettlement, contributes to the stressors young people and their families can experience. Psychosocial development needs can often go unrecognised when they are entwined into broader issues faced by young people during resettlement. Experiences of trauma or loss may effect a young person's capacity to achieve what are considered normal development goals adding to the challenge of settlement.<sup>11</sup>

Low uptake of services can be due to:

- **Racism and discrimination:** Incidents of verbal or physical assault, incivility and denial of services are common and can occur in many settings (e.g., workplace, services, housing), and may act as barriers to help-seeking. Experience of institutional discrimination can also occur (e.g., restrictions from subsidised mental health services for temporary visa holders).
- **A lack of mental health literacy:** refugee and migrant youth may be hesitant to access mental health support services due to lack of knowledge on services available, how to navigate the system, and poor mental health literacy. This can be exacerbated by fear of stigmatisation by the community and discrimination often stemming from friends and family.
- **A lack of culturally-competent mental health services:** refugee and migrant youth may hold beliefs and understandings of mental health, illness and recovery different from mainstream, clinical approaches adopted in Australia. Lack of health professionals or services, knowledge on cultural contexts of mental health may deter help-seeking.

While we welcome the government's recent pledge to expand the headspace centre network, MYAN is disappointed there will be no extension to the additional supports that were made available for mental health plans over the pandemic and 20 subsidised visits will revert to 10 per calendar year. This initiative provided young people with much needed support in recent years. MYAN encourages further investment into culturally-responsive youth initiatives and services, and building a culturally responsive trained workforce.

**One in four young people in Australia from a refugee or migrant background. Cultural responsiveness in the mental health system is no longer an option, but a necessity.** Providing early, targeted, accessible, and youth-focused mental health services can circumvent the short term detrimental effects of mental health disorders, and safeguard young people from longer term, ongoing cycles of dysfunction and disadvantage. MYAN would like to see cultural diversity regarded as an integral component of mental health practice as a whole, rather than as an adjunct to service delivery. Cultural

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<sup>10</sup> Roxburgh, Nina (2018) Youth mental health and the impact on Australia's economy. Available at: <https://nycinquiry.org.au/youth-mental-health/>

<sup>11</sup> Orygen and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (2020) *Responding together: Multicultural young people and their mental health*. Melbourne: Orygen 2020. Available at: <https://www.cmy.net.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Multicultural-young-people-and-their-mental-health-policy-report.pdf>

responsiveness has relevance to all organisations providing mental health services and not only those providing specific services to CALD communities, including advocates, practitioners, and policymakers.

**Recommendations:**

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1. Reinstate the 10 additional visits to a mental health professional subsidised by Medicare.

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  2. Increase funding for tele-health or tele-psychiatry for young people in rural and remote areas that have limited access to onsite mental health specialists and Increase funding for professional phone interpreters for mental health sessions with young people who have English as an Additional Language.

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  3. Invest in a national best practice framework around mental health service provision for migrant and refugee-background young people, with consultation and co-design from young people, their families and communities.

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  4. Provide recurrent funding for mental health literacy resources and programs aimed and refugee and migrant-background young people and their communities (e.g. – youth-led peer support programs, community engagement, etc.).

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  5. Invest in long-term research around the efficacy of mental health policies and services in meeting the needs of refugee and migrant-background young people.

**3. Digital access & literacy**

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly demonstrated how digital access and literacy is a challenge for many newly arrived young people and families. Young people who were without access to an appropriate digital device and/or with minimal digital literacy were disproportionately disadvantaged and unprepared by the sudden and rapid shift to online service delivery and education.<sup>12</sup> Reasons included:

- The lack of appropriate devices and data availability in many families.
- The lack of devices as families often shared a single device, but have multiple family members with learning/technology/data needs.
- Delays in supply of internet dongles as well as postage delays in getting devices/SIMS/dongles to students in some states.
- Unfamiliarity of parents using devices, apps, and programs used by schools, so limited or no support at home for young people.
- Assumptions that all young people are digitally connected and thus able to engage with on-line education and service engagement, limiting the availability of targeted digital support.

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<sup>12</sup> Centre for Multicultural Youth (2021) *Settlement Interrupted: The lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on newly arrived young people in Victoria* CMY: Melbourne

Despite hardship policies in place in all state schools to support families with the purchase of devices and technology for learning—there has been a significant ‘digital divide’ with many students not having adequate or appropriate access to technology devices and data packages to support learning. Access to digital devices appeared to be particularly problematic for newly arrived young people learning outside of the secondary school system (e.g. those studying EAL or attending TAFE), with a lack of consistency amongst educational providers in terms of support offered.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, language barriers or low English proficiency are significant barriers to digital inclusion for newly arrived migrants and refugees. Moreover, newly arrived migrants and refugees need to have digital capabilities to access further education opportunities with the increasing trend of education and skills training being provided in a digital format. Those in rural/regional areas are especially challenged with data and connectivity barriers, which must be improved for regional settlement to be successful.

Targeted investment in digital access and literacy is a critical issue. A lack of digital inclusion has significant settlement implications for more newly arrived migrants and refugees and include disruptions to education, limited ability to engage in employment, and social isolation. Improved digital inclusion supports independence and social connectedness and improves access to education, employment, health and wellbeing information, and access to government and financial services.<sup>14</sup>

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**Recommendations:**

1. Include appropriate digital technology in the Basic Household Goods Package, provided as part of the Humanitarian Settlement Program – such as laptops and a phone for more than one family member, with an appropriate data allowance for a period of time.
2. Embed in-language digital mentoring in settlement services.
3. Invest in ICT infrastructure in regional areas.
4. Invest in more public Wi-Fi ‘hotspots’.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Settlement Council of Australia (2020) *Supporting the digital inclusion of new migrants and refugees*. Available at: <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Supporting-the-digital-inclusion-of-new-migrants-and-refugees.pdf>

## **Recommendation: Investment in a National Youth Settlement Strategy**

### **Proposal**

#### **Investment in specialised youth settlement systems-strengthening a national response to supporting young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.**

Settlement services play a central role in assisting young people from refugee backgrounds face unique challenges and adjust to life in Australia. A targeted national approach to youth settlement support is the most effective way to capitalise on their strengths, address their particular needs, and ensure they are able to realise their full potential.

**MYAN recommends that the Australian Government invest in a long-term, coordinated, and targeted settlement service approach that is available to all young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, and is responsive to their particular settlement requirements.**

The Australian Government has recognised for some time that the needs of young people in settlement are unique to those of children and older adults and that addressing them requires a targeted approach. One of the many ways Australia has distinguished itself as a world leader in settlement has been the investment in youth approaches in settlement services, and structures that support this.

There have been some important youth initiatives in Australian settlement services in recent years, including: youth-specific services in the Settlement Grants Programme, the Unaccompanied Humanitarian Minors Programme, funding for MYAN as one of three peak bodies in settlement services, investment in youth focused approaches in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) and, more recently, the Youth Transitions Support Pilot (YTSP). This targeted approach to youth settlement is globally significant.

While these are important developments, improvements could strengthen and better coordinate this investment. MYAN has long advocated for a National Youth Settlement Strategy designed to complement the National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF), respond to the specific needs, context, and strengths of all young people in settlement, one that is evidence-based and builds on existing good practice and expertise. MYAN would like to see a stronger focus on more targeted, coordinated and nationally consistent support for young people across settlement services, entering Australia through all migration categories. One way to ensure this is to strengthen existing organisations who are working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds at the local level.

### **Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN)**

As the national peak body representing the rights and interests of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia, MYAN provides expert policy advice, sector capacity building activities (including COP mechanisms to facilitate partnerships across the service delivery system/with mainstream services), youth leadership and mechanisms for government to consult directly with young people and embed their voices in decision making process at the national level.

Since its inception in 2013, MYAN has built a multicultural youth national voice and sector by supporting the development of multicultural youth specialist entities and organisations in each of Australia's states and territories. An injection of funding from the Commonwealth into these existing structures will strengthen the capacity of these organisations to provide targeted, localised support to the young people they work with, provide expert policy advice to government, and ensure a nationally consistent and targeted approach to youth settlement to improve and optimise young people's long-term social, civic and economic participation.

As Australia plans to recover from the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, and as our Migration Program prepares to once again respond to existing and emerging migration crises across the world, MYAN believes now is an opportune time to reflect on, and review the existing successes, strengths, and gaps of the current settlement service system.

**Access to targeted, specialist support across the settlement journey is essential to ensuring young people successfully navigate adolescence amidst the significant transitions of settling in Australia.**

Young people who have migrated to Australia have specific needs and strengths in the settlement context and without a targeted response across the settlement services systems they risk long-term social, economic, and civic marginalisation. Achieving good settlement outcomes for young people benefits the whole of Australian society – individuals, families and communities – and supports cultural diversity, social cohesion and inclusion.

Rather than a 'one-size fits all' approach, a targeted approach also involves taking into account specific nuances of the refugee and migration experience for young people such as gender, cultural background, age of arrival in Australia, settlement location (metropolitan or regional), family structures and dynamics, mode of migration to Australia and migration experiences and level of education prior to arrival in Australia.

It also involves a more targeted focus on youth in settlement policy, systems and programming, recognising that multicultural youth specialist services play a critical role in delivering and supporting this targeted approach. It also requires all service providers to build their knowledge and skills for engaging meaningfully with refugee and migrant young people, and to work collaboratively in their approaches in order to meet discreet and intersectional needs.

### **Background- young people and settlement**

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are a highly diverse group due to multiple intersecting factors including country of origin, cultural background, migration stream, socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, faith, and age on arrival, level of English proficiency, prior education, family structures, and workforce experience. They have a range of strengths and capabilities and are often highly motivated to succeed in areas such as education and employment, and to embrace the opportunities available to them, including those afforded to them in Australia's democracy.

Young people experience settlement differently to children and adults due to their age, developmental stage and the various roles they play in helping their family to settle.

Feedback from young people tells us that pressing youth settlement issues include: literacy issues, digital literacy and access issues, socioeconomic disadvantage, unfamiliarity with accessing support services, knowledge of their legal rights and responsibilities, culturally unresponsive support services, distrust of authorities from experiences in their country of origin, trauma recovery and a reduced network of support due to migration.

Immediate settlement periods are the most demanding, and for many young people it is a time where there are new or additional responsibilities and increased expectations from family, peers and the broader society. It is also a time where decisions are made about education and employment pathways and where risk and protective factors (family, peers, community, culture, and faith) are commonly tested and acutely influence a successful transition through adolescence.

Navigating adolescence is made more challenging by the refugee and migration experience and the settlement journey, specifically:

- cultural dislocation
- loss of social capital and established community, social and peer networks
- the impact of the refugee and migration experience on family structures and pressures on family/intergenerational dynamics
- the practical demands of settlement, and
- the traumatic nature of forced migration.

This means that young migrants and refugees are navigating multiple, and more complex transitions than their Australian-born non-migrant peers. Some of these barriers are structural, some relate to the challenges associated with (forced) migration and settling in a new country, and others relate to increased vulnerability to social exclusion at key transition points during adolescence and young adulthood.

These barriers add a layer of complexity to the fundamental transitions that take place during adolescence and young adulthood. Compounded by the developmental tasks of adolescence, and in addition to gender, sexuality, disability, geography, and cultural context, these barriers commonly include:

- Limited or low English language skills
- Racism and/or discrimination—explicit, implicit, structural, and individual
- Different cultural norms and values surrounding help-seeking or accessing government support
- Different cultural values/norms in relation to concepts of youth and adolescence
- Lack of social and cultural capital in the Australian context (e.g. information, networks and conceptual and practical knowledge of the service system or youth-focused programs)
- Limited or lack of access to digital literacy
- More limited services/opportunities in regional /rural areas.

Organisations currently lack the culturally competent or responsive practice required to effectively address these barriers. In the mainstream or generalist youth sector, services are commonly designed

around the experiences of Australian-born, non-immigrant young people. This typically neglects the cultural and migration/settlement experiences of those from refugee and migrant backgrounds and how these impact on their rights and support/service delivery models.

Mainstream services need to ensure they have a workforce skilled in cultural competency and youth-focused approaches that is well-equipped to identify and meet the diverse and complex needs of young people from refugee backgrounds. Young people should not be disadvantaged by their location or the type of service they are accessing. If the expectation is that young people are to be serviced by mainstream programs, then this needs to be universal and services previously underutilised by refugee young people need to be equally equipped with the skills and resources to work with refugee young people. This includes mental health, sexual and reproductive health or LGBTQ services, those in regional and rural areas, as well as areas with less concentration of new arrivals.

Youth specific settlement services are critical in addressing youth specific barriers and supporting positive settlement outcomes and has significant and long-term benefits for young people, their families and communities, and for a diverse, socially cohesive Australia.

### **The need for a coordinated response to recognise and respond to the specific challenges faced by particular cohorts of young people**

There is currently no national overarching plan or strategy to guide services in a coordinated approach to the support of newly arrived young people as they settle over time (i.e. from 'on-arrival' through to the 5-year-limit of federally-funded settlement services). This is particularly apparent for young people who have transitioned out of (the current) Humanitarian Settlement Services (HSS) program and are in the early stages of needing multifaceted support interventions.

While there is focus on youth and youth services within SETS, MYAN is concerned that in the states and territories where there are no multicultural youth specialist service providers, young people are not being referred into this important source of support.

Settlement service delivery to young people must be flexible, tailored and responsive in order to be able to recognise and respond to their particular and individual needs. Progress has been made in Australia to address the particular settlement needs of young people in recent years, but more is required. Fundamentally, this involves a more targeted focus on youth in settlement policy, systems and programming, recognising that multicultural youth specialist services play a critical role in delivering and supporting this targeted approach.

It also requires all service providers to build their knowledge and skills for engaging meaningfully with refugee and migrant young people, and to work collaboratively in their approaches in order to meet discreet and intersectional needs. This includes working with settlement service providers to better recognise and respond to the specific settlement challenges faced by particular cohorts of young people, including young people arriving on the Women at Risk Visa and LGBTQI+ asylum seekers, and include opportunities for co-design.

## **Proposal**

MYAN's existing expertise in youth settlement, infrastructure at national, state and territory levels and broad networks and partnerships with settlement & mainstream services (including COP mechanisms to facilitate partnerships across the service delivery system/with mainstream services), means we are well placed to put forward this proposal, and to work closely with the Australian Government to implement key settlement reform outcomes.

Localised MYAN-affiliated organisations are important vehicles of this work and are the only ones delivering this mix of activities with a specific focus on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This work is not being duplicated by other organisations and the states/territories have a particularly important role to play as a vehicle to facilitate contributions (both in policy and supporting youth engagement) at the federal level. This work facilitates connections between settlement services and between mainstream and settlement services –working within the settlement sector (continuum between HSP and SETS, and with related programs e.g. AMEP) and beyond, in the multiculturalism area.

However, the resourcing (and therefore activities and capacities) of each MYAN-affiliated organisation across Australia vary considerably. Only some states/territories receive specific funding for MYAN-related activities, with auspicing organisations providing 'in-kind' support for activities to support MYAN state/territory-based work.

## **Key components of a National Youth Settlement Strategy**

A national Youth Settlement Strategy provides the framework within which the objectives of effective settlement for young people can be articulated and assessed, and provides the basis for a cohesive and well-coordinated national approach.

Specifically, a national Youth Settlement Strategy provides the foundations for:

- Coordinating effort across the three levels of Government
- Incorporating a youth perspective
- Improving coordination of information and referral pathways
- Managing the intersection of specialist and mainstream services
- Supporting improvements by measuring progress
- Building the capacity of the sector to implement the National Youth Settlement Framework nationally.



### **Incorporating a Youth Perspective**

It is essential that a national Youth Settlement Strategy has input from those young people in the target group and maximize opportunities for all young people to have a voice in promoting their own views and ideas on issues important to them.

A national Youth Settlement Strategy will provide a framework which brings together young peoples' goals for settling in Australia, combined with Government's vision for youth settlement – bringing together support from government agencies, settlement partners, and young people and their families and communities.

Mechanisms such as a national advisory body of refugee and CALD young people would provide important feedback on the implementation of a national Youth Settlement Strategy.

### **Outcomes of funding/investment**

Additional funding to support this existing infrastructure would increase the capacity of MYAN and our partner organisations to respond to the particular issues commonly experienced by young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia - some of which are highlighted in this submission. Investment in a national multicultural youth specialist approach - including dedicated infrastructure at the state/territory level for MYAN activities- will improve economic, social and civic outcomes for young people and contribute to a strong and unified multicultural Australia. MYAN has built a structure through which the Commonwealth government can deliver policy advice and direct engagement with CALD young people but we need additional investment to strengthen this infrastructure.

Specific outcomes include:

#### **For young people:**

- Improved social, economic and civic participation (e.g. successful education, training and employment transitions).
- They are more actively connected to the broader community, contributing to a strong, socially cohesive multicultural society.
- Increased participation in forums and decision making processes on the issues that impact them.
- Improved sense of belonging and inclusion (for young people, their families and communities).

#### **For the service system/sector:**

- Improved workforce capability - a more informed and skilled youth, multicultural and settlement sector to better support good practice and youth settlement outcomes (as per the National Youth Settlement Framework).
- Improved capacity to measure outcomes and contribute to a stronger evidence base

- An improved and more coordinated service system:
  - Within/across the settlement services system
  - Between settlement, multicultural and mainstream services
- Increased responsiveness of mainstream services to young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- Improved national consistency in youth settlement and social cohesion support.

### **Funding**

MYAN has calculated an ongoing budget of \$2,000,000.00 per annum for MYAN and our state/territory partners to deliver cohesive youth settlement activities, dependent on need and population, including the specific needs of rural and regional Australia. Though some states receive SETS funding, this request is for specific MYAN activities, including strengthening collaboration and coordination across the settlement service system and with mainstream services, and providing support to government to deliver the above in employment, education, social cohesion and mental health. We would welcome an opportunity to discuss this proposal in further detail.