

25 January 2024

Treasurer  
The Hon Jim Chambers MP  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

## 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission

Dear Minister,

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission regarding the 2024-25 Federal pre-budget priorities.

MYAN's primary call is for the Federal Government to maintain adequate sustained funding to youth focussed settlement services and programs. Doing so is critically important to provide the support that is essential for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to thrive in Australia, particularly in light of the following current significant issues, both of which require tailored responses within settlement services and more broadly:

- **The cost of living crisis**, which is increasing the risk of poor short to long term financial, social and health outcomes particularly for young people facing structural barriers to economic and social participation, such as those from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- **Risks to social cohesion** associated with the rising cost of living, inequality and racism and discrimination.

### Summary of recommendations

1. Provide adequate, sustained funding for Australian youth settlement programs and services.
2. Invest in youth specific education, housing and employment initiatives to help reduce inequality and promote social mobility (key root causes of social division that can contribute to tensions between different communities).
3. Increase funding for youth programs that promote cross-cultural understanding and dialogue.
4. Support the creation of community-led, youth co-designed initiatives that aim to build bridges between different communities.
5. Invest in initiatives that facilitate opportunities for young people to have their voices heard in political and civic domains to inform policy and decision making.

MYAN also endorses and supports the 2024-2025 Community Sector Pre-Budget Submission prepared by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA). In particular we urge the Government to:

6. Ensure there is appropriate investment in implementing the Anti-Racism Framework across all levels of government and society.
7. Invest in implementing the reforms called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Yours faithfully,



Carmel Guerra OAM

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### About Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN)

MYAN is Australia's national peak body representing young people aged 12-24 from refugee and migrant backgrounds and those who support them.

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 and pays respects to the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which MYAN partners operate across the country, and pay our respects to all Elders past, and present. We work towards reconciliation with, and self-determination for the First Peoples of this country.

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## Youth settlement services essential in current context

Targeted youth settlement services play a vital role in addressing the unique challenges faced by young migrants and refugees in Australia, particularly with respect to education, employment and social engagement. Recognising their significance, the Australian Government has led the world by investing in effective innovative *youth focussed* programs that deliver positive settlement outcomes; a response made in recognition of the complexity of adolescent development.

Continued investment in the evolution of youth-specific settlement initiatives underscores the Government's commitment to understanding and meeting the diverse needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds and ensuring that they reach their potential as active citizens, and are able to fully contribute to, and benefit from, Australian society.

The positive outcomes youth settlement services produce include a sense of belonging and social connection; improved health, mental health and well-being; and better educational and employment outcomes. Achieving good settlement outcomes for these young people also benefits the whole of Australian society – individuals, families and communities – by supporting cultural diversity, social cohesion and inclusion, and contributing to better domestic economic results.<sup>1</sup>

The funding of MYAN as a national peak body has been integral to improving outcomes for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. MYAN provides expert policy advice, capacity-building and mechanisms for direct government consultation with young people. This approach ensures a nationally consistent targeted strategy for youth settlement, optimising long-term social, civic, and economic participation.

The need for continued support for youth focussed settlement policy, programs and services is more important now than ever. As is consistently the case, the needs of young people in settlement are unique and different from those of children and older adults, requiring a specifically youth focussed approach. A young person's settlement needs are distinct from those of adults and younger children, requiring specialised support services due to their age, developmental stage, and role within the family. Young people must navigate the rapid physical, emotional, and social changes of adolescence alongside settlement challenges including particular barriers with language,-school transitions, employment readiness, integration into the Australian community, access to support services, and discrimination. Without specialised support to address these needs, young people risk facing socio-economic disadvantage in the short term and disengagement in the long term, often exacerbated in regional areas.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, National Skills Commission (2021) 'State of Australia's Skills 2021: now and into the future' at <https://www.nationalskillscommission.gov.au/reports/state-australias-skills-2021-now-and-future>; and Refugee Council of Australia (2010), 'Economic, civic and social contributions of refugees and humanitarian entrants: A Literature Review' at [chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/economic-civic-social-contributions-refugees-humanitarian-entrants-literature-review\\_access.pdf](chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settlement-services-subsite/files/economic-civic-social-contributions-refugees-humanitarian-entrants-literature-review_access.pdf)

This is particularly so in the current context of the current cost of living crisis and growing concerns about inequity and racism that risk undermining good outcomes for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, as well as national social cohesion.<sup>2</sup>

### Cost of living crisis

Young adults, particularly those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, face increased personal and financial stress. For instance, Australian Bureau of Statistics data showing that younger Australians have less savings to fall back on and are therefore not well placed to deal with job insecurity, low wage growth and soaring rental prices.<sup>3</sup> According to the Scanlon Foundation's 2023 Mapping Social Cohesion Report almost half (47%) of 18-44 year olds are at best 'just getting along' financially.<sup>4</sup> The 2023 Australian Youth Barometer similarly found that more than half (54%) of young people aged 18-24 are calling for urgent attention to address financial stress.<sup>5</sup> This research also found that nine in 10 young Australians experienced financial difficulties in the past year (including 32% who have faced regular/frequent financial challenges); one in five experienced food insecurity and 44% experienced unemployment in the last year. Housing affordability is also a critical issue for young people with 61% of those aged 18-25 worried about being able to afford their rent.<sup>6</sup> By March 2023, the average young person was allocating a substantial 73% of their income toward rent. **For those dependent on income support, this leaves \$13 per day to meet essential living expenses.**<sup>7</sup>

When financial hardship is unexpected or protracted, young people are at immediate risk of:

- Homelessness, with secondary homelessness common
- Insecure and unsafe housing
- Exclusion from vital crisis supports due to their temporary visa status
- Falling below the poverty line
- Accumulating debt
- Declining mental and physical health, and
- Long-term dependency on emergency relief and charitable support.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Murphy, K (2023) 'Social cohesion lowest on record as Australia reels from cost of living, inequality concerns and voice debate' *The Guardian* 15 November 2023 at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/15/social-cohesion-lowest-on-record-as-australia-reels-from-cost-of-living-inequality-concerns-and-voice-debate#:~:text=The%20measure%20declined%20by%20four,index%20has%20plummeted%2013%20points.&text=The%20Scanlon%20Foundation%20has%20funded%20the%20Mapping%20Social%20Cohesion%20project%20since%202007>

<sup>3</sup> See Taylor, D (2023) 'Australia's cost-of-living crisis is hitting young people and low-income earners hard – but boomers are doing alright' ABC – The Drum (31 May 2023) at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-05-27/australia-inflation-cost-of-living-crisis-young-people-hard-hit/102398408>

<sup>4</sup> O'Donnell, J (2023) 'Mapping Social Cohesion Report 2023' at <https://scanloninstitute.org.au/sites/default/files/2023-11/2023%20Mapping%20Social%20Cohesion%20Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Walsh, L., Gallo Cordoba, B., Cutler, B., Bao Huynh, T., Deng, Z. (2023) The 2023 Australian Youth Barometer, Monash Centre for Youth Policy and Education Practice (CYPEP), at [https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/The\\_2023\\_Australian\\_Youth\\_Barometer/24087186](https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/report/The_2023_Australian_Youth_Barometer/24087186).

<sup>6</sup> Headspace (2023) 'Cost of living pressures for young Australians aged 18-25' at [https://headspace.org.au/assets/20230327\\_Cost\\_of\\_Living\\_Infographic\\_V6.pdf](https://headspace.org.au/assets/20230327_Cost_of_Living_Infographic_V6.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Homelessness Australia (2023) 'New analysis shows youth incomes too low to afford surging rents' Media release, April 19, 2023. at <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/230517-rel-HA-Youth.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> MYAN (2020) "COVID-19 and Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds" Available at: <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/myan-policy-platform-2020-26.5.20-final.pdf>

People from migrant and refugee backgrounds bear a disproportionate burden of economic disadvantage, exacerbating other challenges.<sup>9</sup> For instance, despite a trend of increasing geographic dispersion of people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, they remain over-represented in those parts of major cities like Sydney and Melbourne that are economically disadvantaged and marked by heightened housing and financial pressures.<sup>10</sup> This issue is compounded by discrimination in the rental market, with many landlords unwilling to rent to people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.<sup>11</sup>

This is borne out by the fact that the cost of living was consistently raised a significant issue in MYAN's consultations with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds across Australia in 2023.<sup>12</sup> Issues related to the inflation and cost of living emerged as significant stressors, placing financial strain on these individuals and limiting their social participation while exacerbating mental health stress. Housing concerns were prevalent, with struggles to meet rent and bills leading to increased homelessness, exacerbated by inadequate rent assistance. Unsafe and inaccessible shelters, coupled with unaffordable housing, further restricted housing options. Additional challenges were identified in support systems, where visa conditions contributed to vulnerability, reliance on charitable support, persisting financial disadvantages during resettlement, and limited access to services increased the risk of family breakdown, homelessness, and exploitation.

Insufficient income support, especially amidst the current cost of living crisis, compounded by a lack of awareness among newly arrived individuals about available support and language barriers further exacerbated the challenges. Some service providers were found to be stretched, under-resourced, and often unaware of the specific needs of young migrants and refugees, creating communication barriers. Employment barriers were evident due to structural hindrances, particularly impacting meaningful employment for young migrants and refugees. Health and well-being concerns encompassed the negative impact of financial stress on mental health, the contribution of poverty to family violence, limited access to healthcare for those ineligible for Medicare resulting in health disparities, and upfront payments and changes to bulk billing deterring GP visits for those experiencing poverty.

Accordingly, the socio-economic impacts of the current cost of living crises are likely to be further compounded for specific subgroups of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, including: those more newly arrived in Australia, young people experiencing homelessness, LGBTIQ youth, those on temporary visas, young women, those living with a disability, those with existing health issues, and young people living in regional/rural areas. They are facing increased stressors, including additional challenges in accessing resources, networks, and supports.

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<sup>9</sup> O'Donnell, J (2023) 'Social cohesion, diversity and inequalities in Australian communities' *Journal & Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales*, vol. 156, part 1 at <https://www.royalsoc.org.au/images/pdf/journal/156-1-F-06-ODonnell.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Ziersch, Nicole Loehr & Keith Miller (2023) 'Discrimination in the private rental market in Australia: large families from refugee backgrounds' *Housing Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/02673037.2023.2238626

<sup>12</sup> MYAN (2023) 'Navigating Youth Settlement in Australia: Challenges and Opportunities'; MYAN (2023) 'Submission to the inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia' at <https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/myan-response-to-inquiry-into-the-nature-and-extent-of-poverty-in-australia-2023.pdf>

These findings underscore the vital need to maintain targeted youth settlement services to address the complex challenges faced by young people from diverse migrant and refugee backgrounds in Australia. In particular these services must:

- Build in responsiveness to changing needs and circumstances and ensure young people receive the support they need in the context of changing economic, social, and political conditions.
- Ensure young people are actively engaged, by promoting their ownership and agency, in order to lead to improved settlement outcomes.

### Social cohesion

The decline in the social cohesion index is another key current and related issue that risks undermining good individual outcomes for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds as well as national outcomes more broadly. According to the Mapping Social Cohesion Report, support for multiculturalism does remain strong with 86% of respondents believing multiculturalism has been good for Australia, 85% believing immigrants have been good for Australian society by bringing new ideas and cultures, and 86% believing that immigrants are generally good for Australia's economy.<sup>13</sup>

However, there has, at the same time, been a significant downturn in social cohesion, with the social cohesion indicator at its lowest point recorded in the 16-year history of the survey. Improving social cohesion will require effective inter-related interventions that address the following root causes driving the decline:

- **Cost of living**

There is an added impetus to support those most in need through the cost of living crisis because of the strong inter-relationship between cost of living and social cohesion. For instance, the Scanlon Foundation reports that **the primary contributor to diminished social cohesion is financial stress**. It stands out as the foremost factor influencing an individual's sense of belonging and social justice. Moreover, financial stress is intricately linked to one's level of engagement in social, community, and civic activities, as well as their acceptance of differences and diversity.

- **Increasing inequality and racism**

Racism and racial tensions that have unfortunately emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic, the referendum on a voice to Parliament and international conflicts (including in particular the conflict in Gaza) have also undermined social cohesion in Australia.

A recent systemic review of Australian research during the COVID-19 pandemic found that experiences of racism during this time were pervasive, often from 30-40% and higher.<sup>14</sup> Research reports analysed in the review identified a broad range of racist experiences including in public, online and in employment, with minorities (including young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds) disproportionately targeted and affected.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Mapping Social Cohesion Report 2023.

<sup>14</sup> Jehonathan, B & Amanuel E., (15 Jan 2024) 'Pandemic Racism in Australia: A Systematic Review', *Journal of Intercultural Studies* at <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2023.2298325>

<sup>15</sup> Doery, K., Jones, R., O'Connor, M., et al., (2022) 'Effects of Racism and Discrimination on Mental Health Problems among Young People in Victoria, Australia During COVID-19 Lockdown'. Melbourne: CMY.

Then in 2023, the former Race Discrimination Commissioner, Chin Tan identified that tackling racism must be the next urgent national priority, post the heightened racial tensions and racism that occurred in the context of the Voice Referendum.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, a significant increase in instances of threats, abuse, vilification, and hate speech directed towards First Nations Peoples occurred both in face-to-face interactions and online platforms.<sup>17</sup> For instance, there was a more than 10% rise in the proportion of complaints made by First Nations Peoples about online cyber abuse, threats and harassment to the Australian e-Safety Commission by late May, 2023.<sup>18</sup>

More recently members of the government and other members of Parliament have also recognised the negative impact of the conflict in Gaza and other international conflicts on social cohesion in Australia, including in a debate in Parliament on the topic in November 2023.<sup>19</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that equity and discrimination ranked as the second most critical issue in the Mission Australia Youth Survey, with 31% of young people aged 15-19 considering it a top concern in Australia.<sup>20</sup> Within the past year, 27% of these young people reported experiencing unfair treatment or discrimination, commonly attributed to factors such as physical appearance, race/cultural background, and gender.<sup>21</sup> More generally, more than one in three people from non-English speaking backgrounds feel discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion over just a one year period.<sup>22</sup>

In this context, MYAN welcomes the Federal Government's acknowledgement of the need to expedite the national anti-racism framework.<sup>23</sup> MYAN also considers it essential that targeted intervention to manage the drivers undermining social cohesion are built into youth settlement services including because this young people newly arrived in Australia will understandably have a lower sense of belonging and engagement than others in the community.<sup>24</sup> Successful integration of new arrivals can be undermined by discrimination and racism and requires support and time to establish their social connections and roots in Australia and their local communities.

## Recommendations:

1. Provide adequate, sustained funding for responsive youth settlement programs and services.

<sup>16</sup> Chan, T (2023) 'Whatever the voice vote's result, Australia has a racism problem we must tackle' 6 October 2023, Australian Human Rights Commission at <https://humanrights.gov.au/about/news/opinions/whatever-voice-votes-result-australia-has-racism-problem-we-must-tackle>

<sup>17</sup> Anderson, I., Paradies, Y., Langton, M., Lovett, R., Calma, T., (2023) 'Racism and the 2023 Australian constitutional referendum' *The Lancet* Vol 402 October 21, 2023 at [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)01954-2.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(23)01954-2.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Schultz A. (2023) Voice debate spurs rise in cyber abuse, threats and harassment. The Sydney Morning Herald. May 21, 2023. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/voice-debate-spurs-rise-in-cyber-abuse-threats-and-harassment20230520-p5d9wp.html>

<sup>19</sup> Hartnett, J (2023) 'Australian MPs plead for social cohesion amid fears over Israel-Hamas conflict reverberations' *The Guardian* 16 November 2023 at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/nov/16/australian-mps-plead-for-social-cohesion-amid-fears-over-israel-hamas-conflict-reverberations>

<sup>20</sup> Mission Australia (2023) 'Youth Survey Report 2023' at <https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Mapping Social Cohesion Report 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy K (2023) 'Labour to speed up new anti-racism strategy amid voice and Israel-Hamas war tensions' *The Guardian* Fri 20 Oct 2023 at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/oct/20/labor-to-speed-up-new-anti-racism-strategy-amid-voice-and-israel-hamas-war-tensions>

<sup>24</sup> O'Donnell J (2023) 'Australian Cohesion Index: A report from the Scanlon Foundation Research Institute' at <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-09/apo-nid324371.pdf>



2. Invest in youth specific education, housing, and employment initiatives to help reduce inequality and promote social mobility (key root causes of social division that can contribute to tensions between different communities).
3. Increase funding for youth programs that promote cross-cultural understanding and dialogue (noting that these programs provide opportunities for young people from different backgrounds to interact, learn from each other, and engage in activities that promote respect and understanding).
4. Support the creation of community-led, youth co-designed initiatives that aim to build bridges between different communities. These initiatives could take many forms, including community events, cultural exchange programs, and mentorship programs that allow young people to learn from role models from different backgrounds.
5. Invest in initiatives that facilitate opportunities for young people to have their voices heard in political and civic domains to inform policy and decision making.

As part of the community sector, MYAN also supports the community sector pre-budget submission. In particular we urge the Government to:

6. Ensure there is appropriate investment in implementing the Anti-Racism Framework across all levels of government and society. This commitment is important to create a pathway for all people in Australia to be able to live free from racism and discrimination.
7. Invest in implementing the reforms called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

In summary, MYAN urges the Australian Government to prioritise investments in policies and programs that promote social cohesion and address the cost of living crisis. As a nation, we must recognise the value of supporting young people from diverse backgrounds in achieving their full potential and contributing to our economy and society. We hope that the government will consider our recommendations and take meaningful steps towards building a more inclusive and equitable Australia for all. MYAN appreciates the opportunity to provide these recommendations for consideration and would be pleased to provide further information on any part of this submission.