



Submission on the development of a Multicultural Strategy for the Northern Territory

August 2025

About us

Established in 1914 and by [Royal Charter](#) in 1941, Australian Red Cross is auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. We have a unique humanitarian mandate to respond to disasters and emergencies. This partnership means governments can benefit from a trusted, credible, independent and non-political partner with local to global networks, who will work to implement humanitarian goals in a way that maintains the trust of government and Australian society.

Australian Red Cross is one of 191 Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) – the world's largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

The Movement is guided at all times and in all places by seven [Fundamental Principles](#): Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. These principles sum up our ethics and the way we work, and they are at the core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

We remain neutral, and don't take sides, including in politics; enabling us to maintain the trust of all and to provide assistance in locations others are unable to go. Volunteering is in our DNA, and thousands of volunteers and members support us every day, helping solve social issues in their own communities. All our work is inspired and framed by the principle of Humanity: we seek always to act where there is humanitarian need.

Core areas of expertise for Australian Red Cross include Emergency Services, Migration, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Programs, Community Activities and Programs.

Highlights from our [2023-24 Annual Report](#):



16,800+
members and
volunteers acting for
humanity



213,000+
Australians supported
during 33 emergency
activations

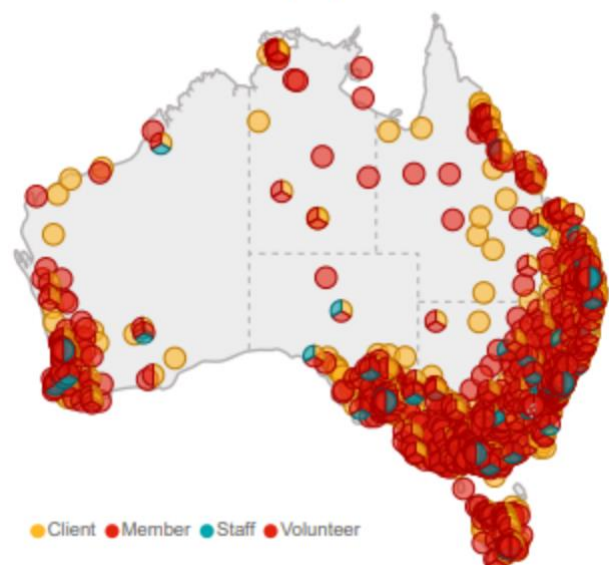


78,000+
social support
hours delivered



23,600+
people from 129
countries supported
through migration
programs

Location of Red Cross people and clients



Purpose

The Northern Territory Government is seeking feedback on the development of a Multicultural Strategy for the Northern Territory.

Australian Red Cross has a longstanding commitment to multicultural inclusion and community resilience in the Northern Territory through our humanitarian programs, particularly within Migration Support and Emergency Services. More broadly, our Fundamental Principles, including Humanity and Impartiality and our local to global to local links inform our practice, insights and approaches to this important characteristic of life in the Northern Territory.

Through initiatives such as Connected Women, social enterprise projects, and multicultural engagement within our Emergency Services work, we have delivered programs that are closely aligned with the current Northern Territory Multicultural Participation Framework. These programs are grounded in community-led approaches and provide practical, evidence-based models that strengthen social inclusion, civic participation, and community resilience.

While our programs are well aligned with the current framework, we continue to observe persistent service gaps that require attention. It is in this context that we submit our contribution—highlighting both the strengths of existing approaches and the areas where further investment and strategic focus are essential to achieving equitable outcomes for all multicultural communities across the Territory.

This submission draws on our experience and community-based insights from delivering engagement programs across the Northern Territory and aims to inform the Strategy's development with real-world examples of what works in fostering belonging and participation for multicultural communities. Specific responses to the draft Strategy, incorporating the themes presented in this submission, are provided in Attachment A.

Summary of recommendations

Australian Red Cross recommends that the Northern Territory government develops a Multicultural Strategy that:

Recommendation 1

Promotes the building of social capital and social cohesion through supporting and enabling place-based, community-led models by:

- increasing investment in place-based, local, co-designed programs,
- expanding support for programs that bridge healthcare gaps in remote areas,
- targeting empowerment of CaLD women and their families,
- embedding inclusive disaster preparedness, response and recovery actions into the government's emergency management model,
- strengthening policy influence through embedding lived experience.

Recommendation 2

Enables and empowers people to take actions to settle and adapt – ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to do so, by:

- focusing on multicultural women's empowerment,
- improving access and understanding of services,
- recognising volunteering as a key inclusion pathway.

Recommendation 3:

Strengthens partnerships and systems to ensure sustainable and effective outcomes for multicultural communities, by:

- fostering cross-sector collaboration
- enhancing access to grants for locally-delivering organisations
- strengthening volunteering systems
- capturing appropriate data

1. Australian Red Cross as a partner to achieve the Multicultural Strategy

- 1.1. The development of a multicultural strategy for the Northern Territory (NT) is an opportunity to affirm the strengths of the of the existing NT Multicultural Participation Framework.
- 1.2. Australian Red Cross' work in the NT aligns closely with the core pillars of the current framework, particularly in the areas of:
 - **Social cohesion** – through initiatives that foster connection, understanding, and trust across diverse communities.
 - **Civic participation** – by promoting volunteering, leadership development, and meaningful stakeholder engagement.
 - **Economic empowerment** – via social enterprise initiatives and support for employment pathways.
 - **Cultural identity and preservation** – through cultural festivals, storytelling projects, and community-led events that celebrate and sustain heritage.
- 1.3. While our work demonstrates the practical application of these pillars and the benefits of inclusive, community-driven program design, our on-the-ground experience has also highlighted key service gaps and evolving needs within multicultural communities.

1.4. Connected Women Program

- 1.5. Established in 2017 and expanded to include families in 2023, Connected Women is a volunteer-led, co-designed initiative that has supported over 750 migrant and refugee women and their families from 45+ nationalities, including LGBTQIA+ participants and individuals with diverse intersectional identities. It runs across Darwin, Palmerston, and Katherine. The program promotes social connection, health literacy, skills development, and employment pathways, while also providing a safe, culturally responsive space for women facing vulnerability due to circumstances such as family and domestic violence or forced marriage. It empowers women to become active contributors and leaders within their communities.
 - 1.5.1. Delivered in partnership with over 30 multicultural organisations and led by experienced Australian Red Cross staff, Connected Women is inclusive and impactful. For many participants, the program has significantly reduced isolation, improved wellbeing, and strengthened their decision to make the Northern Territory their permanent home.
 - 1.5.2. Australian Red Cross is here to walk alongside migrant women and their families to help them connect with their community and build their economic security, contributing to more welcoming communities. The program delivers significant positive outcomes, including enhanced mental health and wellbeing, increased economic independence, and greater community engagement.
- 1.6. Over the past 12 months, the program has engaged 7,982 participants across 245 sessions, including more than 750 women representing over 45 different cultural backgrounds.

1.7. Ninety percent of participants reported increased self-confidence and empowerment. Additionally, 70 percent noted improved job readiness, with many successfully securing employment or pursuing further education, according to the 2022–23 review. An external evaluation by Lendlease found the program delivers a social return on investment of \$11 for every \$1 invested.

1.7.1. 11 Social Connections and Networking events were held in last 12 months, including four major community celebrations such as the Joy of Many Colours Fashion and Cultural Show and the Cultural Food Expo. These events attracted approximately 3,800 attendees in Darwin and 1,200 in Katherine, providing a platform for participants to showcase their talents and celebrate cultural heritage. They promoted cross-cultural understanding and strengthened community connections. To sustain engagement, 39 group activities were delivered, with 807 participant engagements. These sessions offered a safe, inclusive environment where women could explore crafts and interests at their own pace, helping to reduce isolation and enhance wellbeing.

1.7.2. In the past 12 months, the program boosted civic participation: 788 people took part in 79 leadership and skills-building activities. —equipped participants with practical skills. Many women and their families improved their skills through these workshops, with 96% reporting increased capability. As a result, 18 women launched small food businesses, and many moved into volunteering, training, or paid work.

1.8. Health in My Language and Multicultural access program

1.8.1. Over the past 12 months, 128 health literacy sessions were delivered in first languages across regional NT, reaching 916 individuals—including in Katherine and Tennant Creek. These sessions covered critical topics such as cancer screening, women’s sexual and reproductive health, and mental wellbeing. The sessions bridged a significant knowledge gap on often-taboo subjects within many multicultural communities, creating a safe space for open dialogue and learning. For many, it was their first time receiving culturally appropriate health information in their own language. The initiative had a profound impact, empowering participants to make informed decisions about their health and generating high ongoing demand across the regions.

1.8.2. The Multicultural Access Program focuses on addressing the critical barriers multicultural communities face in accessing culturally appropriate primary health care in remote and regional Australia—particularly in areas like Katherine and Tennant Creek. Women’s health and mental wellbeing are among the most affected, with persistent gaps in health literacy, service navigation, and culturally safe support often leaving individuals without adequate care. Through this program, we have reached 680 individuals, helping bridge these gaps and enabling more equitable access to essential health services.

1.9. In Search of Safety

- 1.9.1. Youth education through the In Search of Safety program fosters empathy and understanding of the refugee experience among school-aged children. Each year, the program reaches an average of 1,000 primary school students, helping them understand the challenges faced by people seeking asylum. Feedback consistently highlights this as an impactful program for promoting cultural awareness, empathy, and social harmony from a young age—contributing to a more welcoming and inclusive community.

1.10. Social Enterprise & Volunteering

- 1.10.1. The multicultural food truck and catering model has empowered women by building practical skills, generating income, and promoting cultural exchange. It has also strengthened volunteering as a pathway to employment, particularly for migrant women.
- 1.10.2. Our diverse volunteer base represents over 20 nationalities, with more than 500 individuals engaged—over 80% of whom come from multicultural backgrounds. In the past 12 months alone, Migration Support Programs recorded 2,955 volunteer hours contributed to events and workshops.
- 1.11. In Emergency Services, 75 volunteers were recruited and onboarded during the year, many of whom come from multicultural backgrounds. To support volunteer engagement and capacity building, we delivered “Introduction to Emergency Services” sessions attended by 58 volunteers and community members from multicultural communities across the NT. Additional activities included pre-season briefings, Extreme Heatwave awareness sessions, and informal meet-and-greet events—designed to build readiness, strengthen relationships, and improve community engagement in emergency response.
- 1.11.1. Australian Red Cross’ inclusive and impactful volunteer model in the NT has received wide recognition, including the INPEX Volunteer Organisation of the Year Award, finalist placements for the Chief Minister’s Community Volunteer Organisation and the Excellence in Volunteer Management Award, and the NTES Emergency Services Volunteer of the Year Award.

1.12. Emergency Services Engagement

- 1.12.1. Australian Red Cross is one of the primary providers of emergency preparedness training and volunteer development for multicultural communities in the Northern Territory. In 2024–2025, we delivered over 20 formal training sessions—including Psychological First Aid, Evacuation Centre Management, and Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS)—engaging more than 230 participants, many from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds. We also recruited 75 new Emergency Services volunteers and conducted culturally inclusive sessions such as EmergencyRedi and the Pillowcase Program, reaching 586 children and their families across Darwin, Katherine, and Central Australia. Our work equips multicultural communities with emergency skills and opportunities to lead, volunteer, and support their own communities during crises.

1.12.2. Our experience shows that multicultural communities remain underrepresented in formal emergency response yet often serve as frontline responders within their networks. We recommend the new NT Multicultural Strategy formally integrate emergency preparedness and intercultural volunteering as strategic pillars for inclusion and resilience, with targeted investment in community-led training and multilingual engagement.

2. Building social capital alongside social cohesion through supporting and enabling place-based, community-led models

- 2.1. Evidence from the Connected Women program – engaging over 7,980 participants – demonstrates that locally led initiatives foster deeper trust, relevance, and long-term impact. Investing in these models strengthens social capital and cohesion and reduces the need for crisis-driven interventions.
- 2.2. Cohesive *and* connected communities are more resilient in times of disaster – reducing harm, minimising psychosocial impacts, and accelerating recovery. In the context of increasing climate events and other disasters, this has never been more important.
- 2.3. In emergencies, informal networks – families, neighbours, grassroots groups – often act as first responders, delivering essential support before formal systems activate. These networks develop preparedness plans, help with evacuation and relocation, and share information tailored to their community’s language, context, and needs. Peer-based learning through community preparedness events helps individuals reflect on past experiences and adapt future strategies.
- 2.4. Institutions like schools, sports clubs, and community organisations are key to creating shared spaces for cross-group connection. By cultivating bridging social capital, diverse communities build shared norms, values, and capabilities – enabling them to co-design preparedness plans that reflect all voices.
- 2.5. Australian Red Cross is aware of how family serves as a vital protective factor for migrants, and the pain of family separation. The report, *The Effects of Family Separation on Forcibly Displaced People in Australia*,¹ discusses the profound effect that forcible separation from family has on migrants’ wellbeing, functioning and ability to settle into new lives and the impact on their wellbeing when families are reconnected, which Australian Red Cross supports via the Restoring Family Links program.² The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience also recognises the importance of family in building community resilience: “*resilient communities ...share the importance of social support systems, such as neighbourhoods, family and kinship networks, social cohesion, mutual interest groups, and mutual self-help groups.*”³

¹ Liddell B, Batch N, Bulnes-Diez M, Hellyer S, Kamte A, Wong J, Byrow Y, Nickerson A. 2020. The Effects of Family Separation on Forcibly Displaced People in Australia. Findings from a Pilot Research Project. Australian Red Cross, Carlton, Vic.

<https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms-assets/documents/stories/unsw-red-cross-family-separation-report.pdf>

² Australian Red Cross Restoring Family Links, a centralised, nationwide program works with the global Movement to trace family members, re-establish and maintain contact, reunite families and seek to clarify the fate and whereabouts of those who remain missing. Field officers and volunteers manage individual cases, staff the hotline where new enquiries are received, and conduct community outreach to raise awareness of the program and develop networks crucial to the work of searching for the missing and supporting families.

³ Department of Home Affairs, (2011). National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, p.4

2.6. The Strategy identifies social cohesion as a focus area. Expanding this to include social capital will strengthen responses. Research has found that social capital plays a crucial role in mitigating the adverse impacts of bushfires, especially in terms of mental health and wellbeing.⁴ Different types of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) have varied impacts on bushfire resilience, influenced by their distinct characteristic. The research found that the impact of bushfires on people's mental health and life satisfaction is worse for key groups, including people:

- aged over 66
- who are unemployed or underemployed
- who are single/divorced or separated
- living in remote areas
- living in low-social capital communities.

2.7. The monetary value of social capital varies across groups and communities and can be substantial. For example, for people living in remote areas, higher social capital is equivalent to receiving \$3808 in windfall income annually per person. For a remote community of around 6,770 people this equates to around \$25 million.⁵

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Social capital | The ties and connections between individuals and communities—plays a vital role in disaster risk management by supporting collective action, information sharing, and trust-building. |
| Social cohesion | The sense of trust, belonging, and inclusion—creates more welcoming communities and enables proactive cooperation both in everyday life and in times of crisis. These are critical for migrant and refugee communities, who may be dealing with the long-term effects of conflict and displacement. |

2.8. Long-term investment in inclusive, participatory engagement is essential to overcoming historical mistrust, particularly among First Nations people, newly arrived migrants, and marginalised groups. When intentionally designed, social capital empowers communities to collaborate with institutions and co-create solutions grounded in their lived experience.

2.9. Social isolation—impacting one in seven Australians—is also a major barrier to cohesion. Investing in social infrastructure builds connection and ensures equitable engagement in times of crisis. Resilience requires both institutional leadership (top-down) and community mobilisation (bottom-up). Bonding and bridging capital support mutual aid in multicultural communities, while linking capital ensures that institutions engage with transparency and trust.

2.10. Failure to acknowledge or invest in this relational infrastructure risks undermining recovery efforts. Exclusionary responses erode trust, stall resource flows, and retraumatise vulnerable groups. Communities with limited pre-disaster engagement—especially First Nations and

⁴ Ulubasoglu, M., Pullabhotla, H., Tong, L., Nicholas, A. (2024). *The hidden power of community: Unveiling social capital's role in Australia's disaster resilience*. Centre for Disaster Resilience and Recovery, Deakin Business School. Produced for Australian Red Cross.

<https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms/publications/2024-social-capital-report.pdf>

⁵ Ulubasoglu, M., Pullabhotla, H., Tong, L., Nicholas, A. (2024). *The hidden power of community: Unveiling social capital's role in Australia's disaster resilience*. Centre for Disaster Resilience and Recovery, Deakin Business School. Produced for Australian Red Cross.

<https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms/publications/2024-social-capital-report.pdf>

multicultural groups—often perceive formal responses as lacking cultural recognition, which worsens trauma and recovery outcomes.

2.11. Creating structures that place people at the centre of decisions that affect them is essential to building resilience. A range of practical approaches that support the development of community-led models are provided in Recommendation 1. These approaches reflect the dual benefit of social infrastructure—empowering communities and improving outcomes during both everyday life and emergencies.

2.12. The building of social capital and social cohesion can be promoted in the Strategy by:

- **Enabling an increase in investment in local, grassroots, co-designed programs** that address the specific needs of multicultural communities.
- **Expanding support for programs such as the Multicultural Access Program**, which bridges healthcare gaps in rural and remote areas like Katherine and Tennant Creek, especially for women's health, mental wellbeing, and service navigation.
- **Targeting empowerment of CaLD women and their families, who face unique barriers to participation.** Programs like Connected Women and their families offer a proven, scalable model for capacity-building, employment pathways, and social inclusion. Recognition of the role these programs play in building everyday resilience—not just in times of crisis, but as sustained community infrastructure.
- **Embedding inclusive preparedness, response and recovery actions** in the Multicultural Strategy to help at-risk migrant communities anticipate, respond to and recover from disasters.
- **Strengthening policy influence through embedding lived-experience:** Connected Women also enables migrant women to inform local and national policy through their lived experience. This model provides government and sector leaders with grounded, real-time insights from communities that are often underrepresented in decision-making. Furthermore, Australian Red Cross is supporting the National Framework and Toolkit for Multicultural Inclusion in Emergencies Research project with the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) and Natural Hazards Research Australia (to commence in 2025). This initiative aims to embed diversity and inclusion in emergency management systems nationwide, strengthening outcomes for multicultural communities during crises.

Recommendation 1

Australian Red Cross recommends that the Northern Territory government develops a Multicultural Strategy that:

Promotes the building of social capital and social cohesion through supporting and enabling place-based, community-led models by:

- increasing investment in place-based, local, co-designed programs,
- expanding support for programs that bridge healthcare gaps in remote areas,
- targeting empowerment of CaLD women and their families,
- embedding inclusive disaster preparedness, response and recovery actions into the government's emergency management model,
- strengthening policy influence through embedding lived experience.

3. Enable and empower people to take actions to settle and adapt – ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to do so.

- 3.1. When people have the tools and knowledge they need, they are better able to respond to crisis or disaster situations when they happen, or prevent it (for example, through accessing preventative health support). Learning can best happen in a supportive community environment where people feel they belong, during “blue sky” times, rather than in an emergency.
- 3.2. The Australian Red Cross report, *Emergency Resilience in CaLD communities*⁶ notes how a lack of awareness on the part of service providers about who is in their catchment area, as well as English-language proficiency and cultural differences can present significant obstacles to appropriate responses during emergencies. Australian Red Cross experience is that culturally safe, systemic support in times of crisis and disaster mitigates risks to health and safety of migrants experiencing vulnerability.
- 3.3. During COVID-19, a range of barriers existed to migrants seeking assistance (e.g. to be tested for COVID or to receive a vaccine). This was documented in The Global Migration Lab report, *Locked Down and Left Out*.⁷ Many of these barriers stemmed from less-than-optimal communication by governments with communities and with frontline responders. In Australia, despite policies ensuring free COVID-19 testing and related treatment, 30% of migrants were afraid to be tested or to seek treatment due to their visa status – including fear that accessing support would affect their current or future visa or would lead to being reported to authorities.⁸

⁶ Australian Red Cross (2021), *Emergency Resilience in CALD Communities*, A Chandonnet, p.103.

<https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms-assets/documents/emergency-services/arc-cald-resilience.pdf>

⁷ Hoagland N., Randrianarisoa A., (2021), *Locked down and left out*, Red Cross Red Crescent Global Migration Lab, Australia, p.19; 2000 temporary visa holders surveyed. <https://www.redcross.org.au/globalassets/cms-assets/documents/migration-services/en-rrcrglobal-migration-lab-locked-down-left-out-covid19.pdf>

⁸ Ibid, pg 21

Some migrants report being erroneously turned away from testing or treatment or told they were ineligible.

Our experience delivering programs, including in the Northern Territory, has taught us that if people are empowered with skills and knowledge, they are better able to direct their future in dignity, contributing to a stronger, more inclusive Northern Territory. The Multicultural Strategy can support this by:

- **Focusing on Multicultural women's empowerment:** Expanding initiatives like Connected Women that successfully improve health, social inclusion, and economic participation.
- **Improving access to services:** Enhancing communication and service access through culturally appropriate materials and language support. For example, through initiatives like the bi-cultural health worker. Sustained investment in multilingual education and health programs (e.g., Health in My Language/ Multicultural access) and user-focused digital tools ensures information equity and supports social participation.
- **Recognising volunteering as a key inclusion pathway:** Australian Red Cross engages more than 400 multicultural volunteers in the Northern Territory, many of whom transition to employment and leadership roles. Volunteering should be acknowledged as both a social and economic inclusion pathway. Valuing volunteering as a vital tool for building social capital, social cohesion, wellbeing and community resilience helps to build inclusion. It also contributes to skills development, particularly in regional and remote areas.

Recommendation 2

Australian Red Cross recommends that the Northern Territory government develops a Multicultural Strategy that:

Enables and empowers people to take actions to settle and adapt – ensuring they have the tools and knowledge to do so, by:

- focusing on multicultural women's empowerment,
- improving access and understanding of services,
- recognising volunteering as a key inclusion pathway.

4. Strengthen partnerships and systems

- 4.1. To ensure sustainable and effective outcomes for multicultural communities, a coordinated, whole-of-community approach is essential. Systems that enable collaboration, resource equity, and strong local participation are key to ensuring that no one is left behind.
- 4.2. Effective partnerships and inclusive systems are essential to delivering coordinated, culturally appropriate support – especially in times of crisis or recovery. A strengthened ecosystem of government, business, community, and sector collaboration is crucial to achieving the vision of a truly inclusive Northern Territory.

4.3. Systems in the Northern Territory can be strengthened, by:

- **Fostering cross-sector collaboration:** Strengthen partnerships between government, civil society organisation, business, and community leaders to ensure joined-up approaches to inclusion, emergency preparedness, service delivery, and settlement. Programs such as *Connected Women* and our *Emergency Services* model demonstrate the value of shared delivery across sectors – including collaboration with over 30 multicultural organisations, government welfare groups, and frontline responders.
- **Enhancing access to grants for grassroots- and locally-delivering organisations:** Simplify and strengthen the Northern Territory grants system to ensure funding is accessible, equitable, transparent, sufficient, and outcome-focused. This includes streamlining application processes, removing administrative caps or requirements / expectations for co-contributions, providing capacity-building support, and offering timely, transparent feedback to help organisations deliver programs – often led by volunteers– that build long-term capability. These insights have been documented nationally through the Department of Social Services-led public consultation on a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector,⁹ and a number of intersecting policies, including the Blueprint for the Not for Profit Sector. Enhancing access to grants would ensure that both grass-roots organisations, and national organisations, which deliver embedded, community-led programs in the Northern Territory, can access funding that covers the cost of delivering the service.

4.4. **Strengthening volunteering systems:** Invest in systems that support safe, inclusive, and well-coordinated volunteer engagement. This includes clear onboarding pathways, training, recognition, and culturally responsive volunteer management frameworks. In the NT, Australian Red Cross' volunteer engagement model—over 2,955 volunteer hours across programs in the last year, with 80% from multicultural backgrounds—demonstrates how inclusive systems drive participation, skills development, and leadership.

4.5. **Capturing appropriate data:** Data can help to inform effective public policy and guide decisions to have the greatest impact on humanitarian outcomes. With appropriate ethics, controls and methods, data can shed light on long-term impact of interventions and can definitively prove the effectiveness of certain approaches compared to others. The decisions around which data matters, and how it's interpreted, impacts policy outcomes. For example, at present it is difficult to access disaggregated data in the NT by gender, culture, region, and migration status, which impacts on policy development, service delivery improvements, and ensuring that the voices of underrepresented groups are amplified. It is also difficult to understand the outcomes and lessons learnt from other state-based funded projects, which impacts on future program design. Through standardising minimum data collections and definitions, as well as harmonising data sharing governance mechanisms, administrative burden and duplication could be reduced.

⁹ Department of Social Services, (2024). A Stronger, more diverse and independent community sector. <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/summary-reportfinal23-april-2024.pdf>

Recommendation 2

Australian Red Cross recommends that the Northern Territory government develops a Multicultural Strategy that:

Strengthens partnerships and systems to ensure sustainable and effective outcomes for multicultural communities, by:

- fostering cross-sector collaboration
- enhancing access to grants for locally-delivering organisations
- strengthening volunteering systems
- capturing appropriate data.

Conclusion

- 4.1. The Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Northern Territory's new Multicultural Strategy. Drawing on decades of experience working alongside diverse communities – particularly through the Connected Women program – our submission highlights both the proven value of inclusive, collaborative, community-led programs and the systemic opportunities that remain.
- 4.2. Our programs – such as Connected Women, Health in My Language, Emergency Services outreach, and multicultural volunteering – demonstrate the deep and lasting impact that culturally responsive, place-based approaches can deliver in terms of social cohesion, civic participation, and resilience.
- 4.3. Detailed responses to the draft strategy are provided in Attachment A, which reflect the themes highlighted in this submission.
- 4.4. As the Northern Territory continues to grow in cultural richness, we encourage a Strategy that meaningfully includes the voices of multicultural communities, invests in their leadership, and strengthens systems to ensure equitable access, inclusion, and wellbeing for all.
- 4.5. Australian Red Cross remains committed to walking alongside multicultural communities and working collaboratively with government, sector partners, and community leaders to build a stronger, more connected Northern Territory for everyone.

Attachment A: Australian Red Cross responses to the consultation questions

1. How does the Northern Territory's diverse population make our community stronger?

The Northern Territory's cultural and linguistic diversity is a vital source of strength that enriches our community's social fabric, economic vitality, and resilience. In the NT, Australian Red Cross work with people from over 45 different nationalities who celebrate their unique cultures while sharing common values, creating a vibrant, inclusive environment where everyone feels welcomed and supported.

Programs like Connected Women empower migrant and refugee women to build skills, confidence, and leadership, fostering economic independence and stronger social connections. Many participants become entrepreneurs, volunteers, and community leaders, helping to bridge cultures and strengthen social cohesion across the Territory.

This diversity also enhances our ability to respond effectively to emergencies. Culturally informed volunteers bring invaluable perspectives and trust within their communities, ensuring responses are compassionate and inclusive. Together, this dynamic multicultural landscape makes the NT a unique place – where differences are embraced, shared experiences are celebrated, and communities grow stronger through unity.

2. Does the proposed vision align with your idea of a successful multicultural Territory?

The proposed vision aligns closely with our lived experience working alongside culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) communities. We strongly support its inclusive tone but recommend greater emphasis on the following areas:

- **Opportunity to meaningfully contribute:** in addition to feeling connected, and truly belonging, creating opportunities for people to meaningfully contribute is important. This includes having the ability (skills and knowledge) to be able to access services and systems that enable people to live well in the NT.
- **Observation on the term 'Territorian':** In our experience, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers can often take time to identify as a Territorian. It is often only once someone feels connected, welcomed and engaged that they start to call the NT home, and at that point, share this identity. Its inclusion in the vision is appropriate, however in the definitions section, the scope term of "culturally diverse Territorians" or "anyone who lives in NT" could alienate those who do not yet identify as a Territorian but do identify as someone from a culturally diverse background for whom this policy is developed.
- **Community-led innovation:** Embed support for grassroots initiatives designed and led by multicultural communities, recognising that local knowledge yields more sustainable and trusted outcomes.
- **Targeted inclusion of women and regional communities:** Elevate the role of migrant and refugee women and ensure equitable opportunities for multicultural communities beyond the Darwin region.
- **Inclusive of all differences:** The phrase "regardless of racial, cultural, religious or linguistic background" reflects only certain types of difference and may unintentionally exclude others.

Therefore, it would be more beneficial to use a broader term such as "differences" or to expand the list to include other variations—such as LGBTQIA+ identities, gender diversity, disability, and socio-economic background—to ensure truly inclusive language.

3. Do the supporting principles reflect your vision for a successful multicultural Territory?

The supporting principles provide a solid foundation. To further enhance them, we recommend:

- **Belonging:** Highlight the importance of social capital and social cohesion – not only with the Territory but with each other. Belonging is not only through celebrating stories but also sharing experiences. For example, in the Connected Women program, women share experiences of their dress, food and culture and others actively participate in those experiences which helps to build understanding across cultures.
- **Empowerment and enable:** Recognise volunteerism as a vital form of civic participation and leadership. Emphasise the importance of “empowering and enabling” individuals by providing meaningful opportunities for participation and contribution.
- **Lifting recognition of lived experience to not just inform, but embed people in the solutions:** For example, ensuring services and programs are not only informed by the lived experiences of people, but ensuring they are co-designed, co-delivered and co-evaluated with people with lived experience. This can be done through emphasising co-design and co-accountability, especially in service delivery and policy-making.
- **Safety and respect:** When using the term “difference,” ensure it is clearly defined to encompass all forms of diversity, including but not limited to cultural, racial, linguistic, religious, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities. This clarification helps avoid unintentional exclusion and reinforces a commitment to safety, respect, and true inclusivity for all.
- **Safety:** Promote cultural safety as an operational standard across services engaging with multicultural communities.
- **Community-led innovation:** Embed support for grassroots initiatives designed and led by multicultural communities, recognising that local knowledge yields more sustainable and trusted outcomes.
- **Targeted inclusion of women and regional communities:** Elevate the role of migrant and refugee women and ensure equitable opportunities for multicultural communities beyond the Darwin region and measure their impacts/ equitable outcomes.

4. Do you agree with the identified categories of priority areas for action, and the proposed outcomes and key actions? Why or why not?

Priority area 1: Building our community

- **Outcome 2:** Add “volunteering” – *“For all Territorians to be empowered to participate and contribute to the Territory’s economy including through education, employment, volunteering and entrepreneurship”*
- **Key action 1:** Add “employment” to the list of services. While it is acknowledged that employment is primarily a federal responsibility, the substantial role of the state in supporting people’s employment is helpful to recognise. In our experience, employment provides temporary visa holders with the income that they need to survive.
- **Key action 8:** Add “local community networks and groups” to key action 8 (empower peak bodies to actively engage). Please see the section in the main submission on social capital for information on why diversity of inclusion and support for grass-roots organisations is important.

Missing:

- Key action: To build and grow cultural safety and cultural competence. For example, through increasing awareness of different cultural and religious backgrounds or different people’s experiences. E.g. In Search of Safety (ISOS) program in schools.
- Key action: To create platforms for people to engage and connect with each other to realise their self-worth. This could form part of key action 6.
- Key action: Strengthen Data and Evaluation: Incorporate culturally responsive monitoring and reporting frameworks. Disaggregated data by gender, culture, region, and migration status will improve accountability and responsiveness.

Priority area 2: Wellbeing and security

- **Outcome 1:** Include the “social determinants of health” – *“For all Territorians to have fair and equitable access to services and programs supporting their health and wellbeing and the social determinants of health.”* This will help to address the factors which contribute to health and wellbeing.
- **Outcome 2:** Expand the opportunity for people to contribute and give beyond the economy – for example by saying ‘to contribute to the Territory’s community and economy’. This broadens the ways in which people can contribute beyond economic participation.
- **Key outcome 1:** The Federal Review of the Migration System (Parkinson Report) outlined barriers to employment for temporary visa holders in Annex B. Similarly, evidence shows barriers are experienced in housing and education systems¹⁰. The experiences identified in

¹⁰ See Parkinson m., Howe J. and Azarias J., 2023, Review of the Migration System, Department of Home Affairs, Attachment B, p. 185; Maalsen S., Wolfson P., Rogers D., Nelson J. and Buckle C., 2021, Understanding discrimination effects in private rental housing, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Ltd, pp40–41; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2022, National Antiracism Framework Scoping Report, p.63–66

these documents may assist in the development of this Strategy and they reflect those Australian Red Cross has seen through its employment support programs. This also links to key action 1 of Priority Area 2.

- **Key action 2:** Expand this to supporting children in schools to understand people's backgrounds and experiences. For example, youth education through ISOS fosters empathy and understanding of the refugee experience among school-aged children.
- **Key action 3:** Expand to include bi-cultural health program.

Missing:

- Key action to encourage social enterprise and volunteering and supporting people, organisations and programs designed to engage people through these activities.
- Key action to support people to prepare for and respond to disasters with the impact of climate change in causing increased frequency and intensity of disasters. Australian Red Cross would be more than willing to speak with you further about this risk and provide an example of our effective programming, such as the EmergencyRedi program, and the research underway to build a National Framework and Toolkit for Multicultural Inclusion in Emergencies.

Priority area 3: Social cohesion and lifestyle

- **Key action 1:** Expand ways to engage with the multicultural community beyond the MACMA, for example, with community associations and cross-cultural community groups.
- **Key action 3:** Australian Red Cross has been working with the Federal Government to review structural barriers associated with grants and funding, and would welcome opportunity to discuss this action with the Government.
- **Key Action 4:** It is suggested these links should also include key Federal policies, to improve efficiency and coordination from the federal to the local level.
- **Key action 5:** In addition to learning about languages and culture, it would be beneficial for students to learn about people's background and experiences, for example, the experience of someone who has had to flee their country and seek protection in Australia. Australian Red Cross' In Search of Safety program is a good example of this in action.
- **Key Action 9:** In addition to acknowledging this day, the Strategy could commit to embedding the National Anti-racism Framework's actions in the Territory (noting that Framework was developed with extensive consultation with multicultural communities, facilitated by the Federal Ethnic Communities Council of Australia).
- **Key action 10:** in addition to training, it would be helpful to promote cultural safety as an operational standard across services engaging with multicultural communities.

Missing:

- Outcome: for everyone to feel connected with other people and communities in the Territory, and to experience good social cohesion (trust, belonging and inclusion within a community). This outcome would shift the focus from protection to empowerment, creating an environment where people experience high levels of social cohesion and social capital, which contribute to a welcoming community.
- Key action: Community-led innovation: Embed support for grassroots initiatives designed and led by multicultural communities, recognising that local knowledge yields more sustainable and trusted outcomes.
- Key action: Targeted inclusion of women and regional communities: Elevate the role of migrant and refugee women and ensure equitable opportunities for multicultural communities beyond the Darwin region

5. What role should Multicultural Peak Bodies play in supporting culturally diverse Territorians?

Multicultural peak bodies must be empowered to serve as:

- **Bridges** between government and multicultural communities, facilitating two-way communication.
- **Capacity builders**, supporting smaller and emerging community groups to access funding, develop governance structures, and grow sustainably.
- **Policy influencers**, representing the views of marginalised cohorts including women, youth, and recent migrants.
- **Partners** in co-design, working alongside government in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of relevant policies and programs.

To be effective, peak bodies should be independent, diverse, regionally representative, and sustainably funded, including able to provide remuneration for receiving lived experience advice.

The Northern Territory has more than 94 different community associations. In addition, there are groups, such as Connected Women, which provide independent safe space for cross cultural connection, including with First Nations peoples. All of these forms of community networks are important in contributing to social capital and social cohesion in the Northern Territory.

6. Additional feedback and recommendations for the Multicultural Strategy

Feedback on the draft Strategy document:

- **Section 2 – Scope.** The acknowledgement of intersectionality and different aspects of cultural diversity within our communities, is excellent to see. We hope this is reflected in the final strategy.
- **Section 3.1 – Who we are:** this data set could be strengthened by including (a) overall number of culturally diverse people in NT rather than top 10 for each category. (b) estimated number of temporary visa holders (c) number of people settled in NT through the humanitarian settlement program (d) distribution across the state including by region and remote locations. This would help readers to understand who is included in the strategy, and appreciate that people's visa status may impact on their eligibility for different services and supports.
- **Membership and operational model for the Minister's Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs (MACMA):** Australian Red Cross supports the establishment of this Council and recognises the important role of advisory committees, in particular those that incorporate lived experience, in informing government policy. It is important it represents the voices of diverse community members as well as sector partners, including major community groups. It is recommended that the membership of MACMA is expanded to include additional organisations or groups who work with and can consult with, broader ethnic groups to ensure representation of voices. Australian Red Cross is keen to explore with the NT Government how we can support the MACMA in our role as Auxiliary to the public authorities in humanitarian field, and as a service provider with strong connection to multicultural communities in NT and across Australia.

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