



15 August 2025

To Department of People, Sport and Culture,

RE: Development of a Multicultural Strategy for the Northern Territory

The Northern Territory Council of Social Services (NTCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the development of the Multicultural Strategy (the Strategy) for the Northern Territory (NT).

NTCOSS is the peak body for the NT community and social services sector and is a voice for people affected by social and economic disadvantage and inequality. NTCOSS membership is comprised of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations which work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. NTCOSS represents members across the NT, including several multicultural organisations. NTCOSS endorses Melaleuca Australia's submission regarding the development of the Strategy.

NTCOSS has considered each priority area in the Consultation Paper and has addressed those of highest priority for the social and community sector as follows:

- **Priorities which relate to workforce, skilled migration, skill development, pre-employment.**

The not-for-profit sector and its workforce are a significant part of the NT economy and social fabric (see [Value of the Sector Report 2025](#), p.22). The NT charities sector employs 9.7 % of the NT workforce—more than mining and manufacturing combined (4.7%) and more than construction (8.2%). In the Northern Territory, people who were born overseas are nearly twice as likely to work in the health care and social assistance sector than people born in Australia (21.2 and 12.6 % respectively) (Census, 2021). Workforce attraction and retention across the sector remains a major challenge.

- **Priorities which relate to the social and community sector's program and service delivery, such as humanitarian migration, equitable access to programs; and domestic, family and sexual violence.**

Charities operating in the NT delivered approximated 2750 programs in 2022 with the top three activities being human services, religion and faith-based spirituality and arts and culture ([Value of the Sector Report 2025](#), p13). Multicultural populations account for 6 per cent of beneficiaries of these services ([Value of the](#)

[Sector Report 2025](#), p18-20). It is critical that these services can deliver culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

- **Priorities which related to improving social cohesion through improved cross-cultural awareness, and protections against racism and vilification.** The [National Anti-Racism Scoping Report 2022](#) states that the promotion of the rights of First Nations peoples and communities will foster a more equitable and just society for all (p.25). Ensuring adequate resourcing for cross cultural training and social cohesion is critical.

Priority Areas

1. Build Our Community

As outlined in key actions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8, the multicultural strategy should focus on how to best leverage migration to address workforce shortages.

The NT's charities sector employs 9.7% of the NT workforce—more than mining and manufacturing combined (4.7%) and more than construction (8.2%) (Value of the Sector Report 2025, p.22). This includes frontline service providers, community legal centres, youth services, early years educators, DFSV specialists, and essential administrative and support staff.

The sector is facing a critical workforce shortage across all levels and all sectors. The breadth of the workforce crisis includes administration and support staff, professionals in their early career and beyond, experienced team leaders and senior managers. The key characteristics of this workforce crisis are being unable to recruit and retain appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

The Opportunity

Territorians born overseas make up one-third of the local labour force and have higher labour force participation rates than those born in Australia (77% and 65% respectively). Territorians born overseas are also nearly twice as likely to work in Health Care and Social Assistance (Census, 2021). This represents a significant opportunity to address workforce gaps through:

- **Boosting migration** - Work with the Commonwealth and NT agencies to attract humanitarian and skilled migrants. This should include the NT increasing its quota of Humanitarian Entrants and skilled migrants, investing in services that support refugee and skilled migrant settlement and building the capacity of workplaces and organisations to increase systemic and operational inclusion practices such as adapting recruitment practices and workplace policies and increased cultural competency training for NT workplaces.
- **Recognising overseas qualifications** – Streamline processes to enable faster workforce entry for qualifications in allied health, social work, education, early years, media and communications, monitoring and evaluation, law and legal studies, community development, social policy.

- **Investing in targeted local training** – Expand tertiary education programs in youth work, social work, DFSV response, and community services.
- **Investing in structured mentoring and job pathways** to integrate multicultural workers, including young people, into local labour markets.
- **Expanding overseas student intake** – and strengthening pathways from study to permanent employment for recent graduates.
- **Cultural competence training** – Equip employers and the workforce with skills to ensure safe, inclusive, non-exploitative workplaces for multicultural employees. This should include targeted training for workplaces in remote areas:
 - Ongoing cultural humility and competency training for staff and leadership.
 - Resourcing from the NT government for workplaces to implement inclusion programs, translate essential information and adapt recruitment practices.
 - Targeted training for workplaces in remote areas where there are no multicultural or migrant services.

Retention must also be a government priority. People born overseas are more likely to leave the NT than those born in Australia (Census, ABS 2021). To improve retention, the government should:

- **Invest in a dedicated strategic and accountable multicultural peak body** - To represent and engage multicultural communities, drive systemic advocacy, coordinate sector-wide collaboration, and ensure multicultural perspectives are embedded in Territory-wide policy and service planning.
- **Invest in cultural events and spaces** where communities can connect, celebrate, and maintain cultural traditions in a way that meets their specific needs.
- **Maintain legislative protections** from racial discrimination and vilification (see Section 4).
- **Provide Anti-Discrimination workplace training** – Equip employers and their workforce with up-to-date information on their role and responsibilities in addressing discrimination in the workplace and broader community. Training should be targeted at industries and organisations employing or engaging large cohort of newly arrived migrants and on visas reliant on Government grants.
- **Increase initiatives with a focus on cultural safety, security and cross-cultural competency training** when working with First Nations people and communities (see section 3).

2. Wellbeing and security

As outlined in key actions 1,5 and 6, the multicultural strategy should focus on the delivery of culturally appropriate services.

In 2022, charities operating in the NT delivered approximately 2,750 programs, with the top three focus areas being human services, religion and spirituality, and arts and culture (Value of the Sector Report 2025, p.13). Multicultural communities account for 6% of beneficiaries (p.18-20). Despite this, systemic barriers remain, including language differences, limited familiarity with systems, and cultural inappropriateness of services.

The Opportunity

Services that are culturally informed, address the key structural barriers to participation, and build trust and accountability and more effective at delivering sustained results. The NTG can better deliver services through:

- **Maintaining adequate funding through indexation-** To ensure services are resourced to provide equitable access, the NTG should urgently restore funding to 2018 levels to ensure that front-line services can properly respond to the needs of vulnerable populations. All future funding should be indexed to award increases and consumer price index.
- **Improve awareness of systems, services and supports to migrant communities** such as workplace rights and responsibilities, housing obligations and understanding of discrimination and gender equality laws.
- Ensuring adequate access to programs that are **culturally and linguistically appropriate**, particularly in DFSV, mental health and housing services.
- Ensuring safe, inclusive spaces and programs for multicultural young people.
- Support programs and initiatives for the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence as well as promotion of healthy and respectful relationships in families and communities by **adopting Our Watch's 2024 findings** on preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. [*Preventing violence against women from migrant and refugee backgrounds 2024.*](#)
- Increasing funding to **skills development and pre-employment programs** targeted at multicultural communities. (See section 1 above).

3. Social cohesion and lifestyle

As outlined in key actions 7 and 10, strong social cohesion requires broader community understanding of both multicultural communities and Aboriginal cultures. Without this, other initiatives are less effective.

The *National Anti-Racism Scoping Report 2022* states that the promotion of the rights of First Nations peoples and communities will foster a more equitable and just society for all (p.25).

As such, NTCOSS recommends that the Strategy should:

- Support pre-employment, skills, and workforce programs that build cross-cultural understanding between multicultural and Aboriginal communities.
- Require cultural safety, security, and competency training for all social and community sector staff, that recognises the on-going impacts of colonisation and trauma on First Nations people and communities
- Embed trauma-integrated healing approaches to working alongside Aboriginal people to ensure safety—physical, psychological, and emotional—for clients, communities, and staff.
- Adopt Australia’s national reforms such as the Multicultural Framework – [Towards Fairness](#) and Australia’s [Anti Racism Framework](#) and consider impact and alignment relevant to the NT context, ensuring we progress with our national counterparts towards greater inclusion.

4. Other considerations

Legislative frameworks must protect multicultural groups from discrimination as a means of promoting social cohesion.

NTCOSS has consistently raised concerns with the Anti-Discrimination Amendment Bill 2025. The proposed shift from a “prohibit conduct” model to an “incite hatred” model risks leaving serious, everyday acts of vilification—such as racist slurs, verbal abuse, or hateful graffiti—outside the scope of legal protection.

NTCOSS recommends:

- Maintaining the *Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*, particularly section 20A which currently prohibits conduct in a public space that is reasonably likely to offend, insult, humiliate or intimidate another people or group of people that is done because of an attribute of a person or group of people.

Kind regards,

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