

# Moving Forward Together to End Violence Against Women and Children

## Federal Budget Submission 25/26



### **Always Was, Always Will Be.**

Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) is proud to acknowledge that the land to which we migrated, and on which we work and live, was and always will be Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to the Elders and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, on whose land our offices are located, and to all First Nations people, cultures, and connections to Country and waterways.

### **The Multicultural Centre for Women's**

The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) is a national, community-based organisation committed to the achievement of health and wellbeing for and by migrant and refugee women.

### **Vision**

Migrant and refugee women are free from all forms of discrimination, have autonomy over their lives, and experience health equity, wellbeing, and safety in society.

### **Our Purpose**

We advocate and educate to strengthen the health, wellbeing, safety and leadership of migrant and refugee women in Australia.

# Contents

Preamble	4
The call for investment in tailored programs and national coordination	5
Making the case for nationally coordinated and inclusive safety and gender equity programs	6
How the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health makes a difference	8
Prevention of gendered violence and early intervention programs tailored for multicultural communities	10
Call for investment	11
References	14

# Preamble

---

As Australian governments and communities work to end the perpetration of violence against women and children, it is important that women and children from all communities, regardless of their cultural background or migration status, are protected and included. This means that we need to develop solutions to prevent violence against women and children that engage the whole community so that we can move forward together toward a safer and more gender-equitable future.

Australia is an ethnically and culturally diverse country, with more than half (51.5%) of the population born overseas, or with at least one parent born overseas. Australia is also proudly linguistically diverse with more than 23% of the population speaking a language other than English at home. More than 2.6 million women who have made Australia their home are born in a main non English speaking country.<sup>1</sup>

Government strategies to end gendered violence and to advance gender equality clearly recognise that migrant and refugee women make up a priority population that is specifically disadvantaged and therefore disproportionately impacted by gendered violence.<sup>2</sup> It is evident that gendered and racialised disadvantage create an uneven playing field for migrant and refugee women – in workplaces, the health system,

education, socially, and in the family. As the whole community negotiates the epidemic of gendered violence in the context of difficult economic times and a cost-of-living crisis, some of us are more severely impacted. Economic crises further entrench gender and racial inequality. For migrant and refugee women, the way these inequities intersect widens barriers to equitable social and economic participation, as well as safety from gendered violence.

Over the last two years the Government has made significant investment into key areas impacting women, including women's health and responding to gendered violence. In the area of health, the Health in my Language program, funded in the 2024/25 budget for 12 months, provides much-needed, in-language, tailored sexual and reproductive health education to migrant and refugee women across Australia. Such tailored programs provide opportunities for women to make informed decisions about their own health, laying the foundations for bodily autonomy and reproductive choice.

The most recent allocation of \$4.4 billion to address gender-based violence and respond to the Rapid Review into Prevention Approaches, including through investing in frontline services and initiatives to prevent violence, will make a significant difference to women.

However thus far, there has been insufficient attention paid to, or specific investment made toward addressing, the specific needs of migrant and refugee women. The multicultural sector and multicultural communities have an important role in moving the nation forward together toward a safer and more gender-equitable future.<sup>3</sup>

As Australians are called to respond to the ubiquitous problem of gendered violence, and the economic challenges

that face us ahead, and with increasing diversity and complexity of community needs, we must ensure that the most vulnerable people are not left behind. Government must continue to invest in specific programs and initiatives that build equity and safety for migrant and refugee women, and we must ensure that these programs and initiatives are properly coordinated and supported nationally. This will ensure that the whole community is moving ahead together.

## The call for investment in tailored programs and national coordination

- 1.** Provide ongoing funding to MCWH to extend its specialist coordination and capacity building role nationally to facilitate national consistency, reduction of duplication, and the sharing of practice wisdom among key stakeholders, including multicultural organisations and communities delivering gendered violence prevention programs and activities.
- 2.** Provide funding to MCWH to engage men and boys from multicultural communities in a program to prevent gendered violence, and develop a national guide for the multicultural sector, multicultural communities and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.
- 3.** Provide ongoing funding to MCWH and its project partners to deliver in-language education about gendered violence, including domestic, family and sexual violence, and workplace sexual harassment across Australia, utilising the existing infrastructure of the national Health in my Language program.

# Making the case for nationally coordinated and inclusive safety and gender equity programs

---

Women and girls from migrant and refugee communities make a robust contribution to Australia's economic, social, and civic life. However, substantial areas of inequality prevent them from achieving optimum health and wellbeing, as well as safety and equity in the community and the workplace.

Gender and race-based discrimination and sexual harassment remain significant barriers to safety, equity at work, and to workplace advancement for migrant and refugee women. Across Australia, the gendered pay gap remains persistent for all women.<sup>4</sup> While data on the pay gap experienced by migrant and refugee women is unavailable at the national level, in Victoria, the pay gap for migrant and refugee women is 33-36%<sup>5</sup> which is double the national average<sup>6</sup>. Again, in Victoria, while 40% of migrant women are employed in management or professional occupations only 2.5% of senior decision-making roles are filled by migrant women.<sup>7</sup> Nationally, the majority of employed migrant women (55%) work as sales assistants,

community or personal service workers, clerical and administration workers, or as labourers and machinery operators, in occupations and industries that have high casualisation rates.<sup>8</sup>

Migrant and refugee women also experience higher levels of workplace exploitation<sup>9</sup>, unemployment and under-employment<sup>10</sup>. Migrant and refugee women, particularly those who have recently arrived, also experience higher levels of workplace exploitation; concerningly, up to 16% of recent migrants are paid less than the national minimum wage, compared with 9% among the general population.<sup>11</sup>

Rates of gendered violence remain at unacceptable levels across the country, and while there is no evidence that migrant and refugee women experience a higher incidence of domestic and family violence, we do know that this group experiences higher rates of sexual harassment in the workplace.<sup>12</sup> A recent study found that 46% of migrant women surveyed had experienced sexual harassment in their workplaces, compared with 41%

among the general female population.<sup>13</sup> Race and gender discrimination in workplaces make migrant and refugee women more vulnerable to gendered violence and leaves them with fewer resources to act on it.

With respect to domestic, family and sexual violence, we know that migrant and refugee women face significant barriers to accessing the support that they need at an early point, and as a result, experience more prolonged and severe forms of such violence over time.<sup>14</sup>

This situation presents an opportunity to provide tailored early intervention support so that migrant and refugee women have the information and support they need to act at an earlier point. In addition, we have an opportunity to make better use of a vital resource. The multicultural sector and multicultural communities play an important role in preventing gendered violence and supporting migrant and

refugee women to respond to gendered violence at an earlier point.<sup>15</sup> However, there has not been sufficient focus or investment to support a national and consistent approach to the important work of this sector.

Targeted investment in multicultural sector programs and initiatives to prevent violence against women, as well as investment in national coordination and capacity building, is crucial to progressing the government's agenda with respect to gender equity and gendered violence prevention. Investing in such initiatives has economic, social and health benefits for the whole community, with modelling showing that in Victoria alone, preventing gendered violence has resulted in an annual benefit of \$600m per year. Even a small decrease in the number of migrant and refugee women experiencing gendered violence and all its flow-on impacts, would have significant benefits, including economic ones.<sup>16</sup>



# How the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health makes a difference

---

The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) is a national migrant and refugee women's organisation, in operation since 1978. MCWH provides tailored, responsive, accessible, and equitable wellbeing and safety programs for migrant and refugee women. MCWH also provides coordination, training, capacity building and support to key organisations across Australia to support their work in delivering in-language health education or other gendered programs.

When working with migrant and refugee women, MCWH breaks down access barriers by offering in-language outreach programs delivered by highly trained peer educators, to ensure migrant and refugee women can access information and support where it works best for them: where they work, live, study and play. MCWH's in-language programs extend nationally, through partnerships with key organisations based in each Australian state and territory.

MCWH works with women who experience significant barriers to accessing mainstream services, such as migrant women workers, newly

arrived women, those parenting in the early years, women on precarious visas, and women with low or no proficiency in English and need additional information and assistance to navigate Australian health and support systems.

MCWH is responsive to the needs of our community, tailoring and adapting our service delivery to suit changing needs. MCWH employs flexible ways to reach communities with the women's health and gendered violence information they need, by outreach through in-person group sessions in workplaces, schools, community centres, religious centres, parks and other public places, as well as through in-language radio segments, telephone calls, video messaging and social media. In 2023/24, MCWH's education programs provided in-language education and information to almost 13,000 participants from 55 cultural backgrounds nationally.

MCWH delivers training for service providers, provides input into policy and builds capacity of employers, community service organisations, local councils, and health services to adapt their programs to better respond to migrant and refugee women's needs. In 2023/24, MCWH made submissions



to 2 government inquiries, appeared at a public hearing, delivered 35 presentations at national and local conferences and fora, and provided specialist advice about migrant and refugee women's health and wellbeing to 45 committees and 52 expert consultations.

Since 2014, MCWH has played a central role in providing guidance and resources to the domestic and family violence and multicultural sectors, and in delivering gendered violence prevention programs, with a specific focus on migrant and refugee women and their communities. Landmark resources such as Key issues in working with men from immigrant and refugee communities in preventing violence against women; Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities in Australia; The Equality@Work model; and the Challenging myths about culture and violence in migrant and refugee communities guide, continue to provide guidance to prevention practitioners and policy makers who seek to engage multicultural communities in gendered violence prevention.

MCWH also plays a coordination and capacity building role with respect to multicultural organisations delivering programs to address and prevent gendered violence. The Connecting Communities project, delivered in partnership with Safe and Equal, Victoria's peak body for family violence, brings together 33 organisations that are tasked with delivering primary prevention activities with their local multicultural communities. MCWH and Safe and Equal deliver a wraparound network of capability building and support, and provide these organisations with ongoing support, training and learning platforms. The project enables participating organisations to work together under common frameworks, share what they are learning, and collectively contribute to the evidence base of what works to prevent violence against women and children in practice. Each participating organisation delivers its own tailored activities that are appropriate for local needs, while the project's coordination and capacity building aspects reduce duplication of effort and ensure that there is retention of practice wisdom relating to multicultural communities.



# Prevention of gendered violence and early intervention programs tailored for multicultural communities

---

The Australian Government's National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 and its Working for Women Gender Equality Strategy demonstrate a clear commitment to ensuring that gendered inequality and violence become a thing of the past. While the Government has already made great strides in gender equality, primary prevention and response, there remains a long way to go when it comes to migrant and refugee women.

The domestic and family violence system remains inaccessible to many migrant women. Research has shown that family violence reporting remains low among migrant and refugee women, compared with the general population in which reporting significantly increases in response to high profile government activity to address the problem.<sup>17</sup> This data is particularly concerning given that for migrant and refugee women, research has shown that violence can be more

severe and prolonged, due to service access barriers.<sup>18</sup>

With respect to workplace sexual harassment, even though rates are higher among migrant and refugee women, reporting is low – a recent study showed that only 15% of migrant and refugee women who experienced sexual harassment reported the abuse to an authority outside of the workplace, and 37% told no one about their experiences. In one third of cases, the women had been threatened or warned not to report the abuse.<sup>19</sup>

More investment must be made into community-led programs that build awareness about gendered violence and facilitate earlier access to the system, including tailored, in-language, community-based outreach programs.<sup>20</sup> Alongside response programs, it is vital that there is a long-term investment into the primary prevention of violence, along with

the recognition that multicultural communities have a central role to play, particularly via the leadership of migrant and refugee women. Migrant and refugee women's organisations should be provided with ongoing and secure funding to enable them

to share their specialist expertise, to build capacity within multicultural communities, and to ensure that effort is coordinated, thereby reducing the current duplication of effort and loss of practice wisdom that is occurring

## In 2025-26 MCWH calls upon the Australian Government to:

- 1.** Provide ongoing funding to MCWH to extend its specialist coordination and capacity building role nationally to facilitate national consistency, reduction of duplication, and the sharing of practice wisdom among key stakeholders, including multicultural organisations and communities delivering gendered violence prevention programs and activities.
- 2.** Provide funding to MCWH to engage men and boys from multicultural communities in a program to prevent gendered violence, and develop a national guide for the multicultural sector, multicultural communities and the domestic, family and sexual violence sector.
- 3.** Provide ongoing funding to MCWH and its project partners to deliver in-language education about gendered violence, including domestic, family and sexual violence, and workplace sexual harassment across Australia, utilising the existing infrastructure of the national Health in my Language program.

# The Investment

## 2025 - 26

To ensure that disadvantaged communities remain front and centre of government investment, and that migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people don't fall further behind, the following investment is needed.

### Gender equality, prevention & early response to violence

---

- a. \$574,564** for MCWH to extend its specialist coordination and capacity building role nationally to facilitate national consistency, reduction of duplication, and the sharing of practice wisdom, among key stakeholders, including multicultural organisations and communities delivering gendered violence prevention programs and activity.
- b. \$594,040** for MCWH to engage men and boys from multicultural communities in a program to prevent gendered violence, and develop a national guide for the multicultural sector, the domestic, family and sexual violence sector and multicultural communities.
- c. \$3,806,036** for MCWH and its project partners to deliver in-language education about gendered violence, including domestic, family and sexual violence, and workplace sexual harassment across Australia, utilising the existing infrastructure of the national Health in my Language program.

---

**Total Investment 25/26**

**\$4,974,640**

---



MANSCORA

# References

- 1 ABS (2021) Census of Population and Housing, Australian Government.
- 2 Commonwealth of Australia (2023) First Action Plan & Outcomes Framework 2023–2027; Commonwealth of Australia Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2024) Working for Women a Strategy for Gender Equality
- 3 Vaughan, C., Chen, J., Sullivan, C., Suha, M., Sandhu, M., Hourani, J., ... Murdolo, A. (2020). Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: The MuSeS project (Research report, 11/2020). Sydney: ANROWS
- 4 WGEA (2023), Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard: Key results from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's Employer Census 2022-23
- 5 Victorian Skills Authority, State of the Victorian Labour Market: Victorian Skills Plan 2022, Victorian Government, July 2022.
- 6 Victorian Government, Our Equal State: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023-2027, p. 19.
- 7 ABS (2016) The Census of Population and Housing, Australian Government. ABS (2018) Understanding Migrant Outcomes.
- 8 ABS (2021) Charts on casual employment, occupation and industry, August 2021.
- 9 Coates, B., Wiltshire, T., and Reysenbach, T. (2023). Short-changed: How to stop the exploitation of migrant workers in Australia. Grattan Institute.
- 10 Australian Government, Australian Labour Market for Migrants: July 2023, Jobs and Skills Australia.
- 11 Coates, B., Wiltshire, T., and Reysenbach, T. (2023). Short-changed: How to stop the exploitation of migrant workers in Australia. Grattan Institute.
- 12 Segrave, M., Wickes, R., Keel, C., & Tan, S. J. (2023). Migrant and refugee women in Australia: A study of sexual harassment in the workplace (Research report, 06/2023). ANROWS.
- 13 Australian Human Rights Commission, Time for Respect: Fifth National Survey on Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, 2021.

- 14 Vaughan, C., Davis, E., Murdolo, A., Chen, J., Murray, L., Quiazon, R., Block, K., & Warr, D. (2016). Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia. The ASPIRE Project: Research report (ANROWS Horizons 07/2016). Sydney: ANROWS.
- 15 Vaughan, C., Chen, J., Sullivan, C., Suha, M., Sandhu, M., Hourani, J., ... Murdolo, A. (2020). Multicultural and Settlement services Supporting women experiencing violence: The MuSeS project (Research report, 11/2020). Sydney: ANROWS
- 16 Impact Economics and Policy (2023), Return on Equity: Health and Economic Dividends of Investing in Women's Health Services, Victorian Women's Health Services Network.
- 17 L. Satyen, J. Toumbourou, J. Heerde, M. Supol, A. Ranganathan (2021) The Royal Commission into Family Violence: Trends in Help-seeking behaviour among migrant and non-migrant women, presented at the Deakin Research on Violence Against Women Inaugural Conference: Interdisciplinary Research on Family Violence, 22 October.
- 18 Lum On, M. et. al. (2016). Examination of the health outcomes of intimate partner violence against women: State of knowledge paper (ANROWS Landscapes, 03/2016).
- 19 Segrave, M., Wickes, R., Keel, C., & Tan, S. J. (2023). Migrant and refugee women in Australia: A study of sexual harassment in the workplace (Research report, 06/2023). ANROWS.
- 20 Vaughan, C. et. al. (2016). Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia. (ANROWS Horizons 07/2016).



Multicultural Centre for Women's Health  
Suite 207, Level 2, Carringbush Building,  
134 Cambridge Street, Collingwood, VIC 3066  
P: (03) 9418 0999 | [www.mcwh.com.au](http://www.mcwh.com.au)  
E: [info@mcwh.com.au](mailto:info@mcwh.com.au) | [mcwh.com.au](http://mcwh.com.au)