



# Building Belonging

community insights to shape the  
northern territory's multicultural future

Partnered with



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Community  
insights to shape  
the northern  
territory's  
multicultural  
future



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## Key findings and implications

Findings are organised under three strategic priority areas:

### Building our community

- Strong support for a well-resourced multicultural peak body to lead systemic advocacy, Policy, coordination, and community engagement.
- Settlement systems are fragmented and under-resourced; communities call for better planning, language access, and navigation support.
- Multicultural communities rely heavily on informal networks, highlighting the need for accessible, coordinated support pathways.

### Wellbeing and security

- Equitable access to services—especially health, education, justice, and employment—is a major concern.
- Language barriers, cultural insensitivity, and systemic exclusion hinder participation.
- Safe, inclusive spaces and better access to mental health support.
- Economic participation is constrained by lack of recognition for overseas qualifications and limited pathways to employment.

### Social cohesion and lifestyle

- Respect and safety are linked to cultural expression, inclusive environments and freedom from racism.
- Communities report discrimination and cultural erasure, particularly in schools and workplaces.
- Communities want genuine engagement in decision-making and policy development.
- Diversity is seen as a strength and central to NT identity, but needs to be actively respected, celebrated and embedded in public life.

## Next steps

The findings point to several actionable priorities for the NT Government:

- Fund a strong and effective multicultural peak body to lead coordination, Policy and advocacy.
- Improve service accessibility through professional language support, co-design, and outreach.
- Invest in community-led initiatives and culturally safe spaces, including providing opportunities for youth leadership.
- Develop smoother pathways for recognition of overseas qualifications and support job readiness and pathways to employment through community-driven programs.
- Embed anti-racism education and cultural competency across institutions.
- Create consistent mechanisms for multicultural engagement in governance and planning.
- Enable supporting activities that celebrate culture and diversity.

These steps will help ensure that multicultural communities across the NT are not only included but empowered to shape a more equitable, inclusive, and vibrant Territory.



# Introduction

The Northern Territory is home to a vibrant and rapidly growing multicultural population. As migration continues to shape the Territory's social and economic fabric, there is a shared aspiration to build an inclusive environment – one where everyone feels they belong and can contribute fully to community life.

Key strengths are already helping to realise this vision. Community leadership, strong informal support networks, and a deep commitment to cultural identity and connection are evident across the Territory. These assets provide a strong foundation for inclusion and participation.

However, significant barriers remain. Systemic challenges in service access, employment, and settlement coordination continue to limit opportunities for many multicultural communities – particularly new and emerging communities, young people, and those on temporary visas.

In May 2025, the Northern Territory Government (NTG) released the Development of a Multicultural Strategy for the Northern Territory consultation

paper, outlining proposed priority areas, outcomes, and actions to guide its vision for a strong and inclusive multicultural Territory over the next decade.

Melaleuca Australia, a leading multicultural support organisation in the NT, welcomed this initiative. In response to requests from cultural support organisations, Melaleuca partnered with the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia (MCSCA) to facilitate a formal consultation process, ensuring that community voices were meaningfully reflected in the development of the NTG's 10-Year Multicultural Strategy and Multicultural Action Plan (MAP).

To support this work, Melaleuca engaged ImpactInstitute to independently analyse the consultation data and prepare this research report. The findings presented here offer insights into the lived experiences, priorities, and aspirations of multicultural communities across the NT, and are intended to inform future policy and strategic planning.

## Research scope

This research was undertaken to support the development of the NTG's 10-Year Multicultural Strategy and MAP by providing a structured analysis of community feedback gathered through Melaleuca's consultation process. The aim is to ensure that the voices of multicultural communities are not only heard but actively shape the Territory's future direction.

The scope of the research includes:

- Analysis of data from nine face-to-face consultation sessions with community groups
- Engagement with 60 young people through community forums.

- Review of four targeted surveys completed by multicultural youth, community leaders, and organisations
- Synthesis of qualitative and quantitative insights to identify recurring themes, priorities, and opportunities
- Mapping of community feedback to the strategic framework outlined in the NTG Consultation Paper, including its proposed priority areas, outcomes, and actions

This approach ensures that the findings are directly relevant to the NTG's policy development and reflect the diverse perspectives of multicultural communities across the Territory.

# Methods

ImpactInstitute applied a thematic analysis framework to all data sources, ensuring a consistent and rigorous approach to interpreting community feedback. The methodology involved:

- Reviewing and coding qualitative data from consultation transcripts
- Aggregating and interpreting survey responses from three stakeholder groups
- Identifying recurring themes and subthemes across both qualitative and quantitative data
- Aligning findings with the NTG's proposed priority areas and outcomes



## Face-to-face community group consultations

Melaleuca facilitated nine in-person sessions with multicultural community groups across the NT. Each session provided a space for open dialogue, allowing participants to share lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations.

These sessions were guided by the same core questions used in the Community Members Survey and focused on:

- Safety and inclusion
- Access to services
- Cultural strength
- Representation in decision-making
- The role of a multicultural peak body

Groups consulted included representatives from Burmese, Congolese, Indian, Latin American, Pakistani, Filipino, Vietnamese, Zimbabwean communities, and MCSCA member organisations. Transcripts were thematically analysed to identify recurring insights and align them with the NTG's priority areas and outcomes.

## Community members survey

This survey explored the lived experiences of multicultural community members, focusing on inclusion, safety, access to services, and representation. Participants responded to six open-ended and multiple-choice questions covering:

- What helps them feel respected and safe in the NT
- Barriers to accessing jobs, housing, justice, and services
- Ways to strengthen cultural identity and inclusion
- How communities can be better heard in decision-making
- The role of a multicultural peak body
- Areas needing the most improvement

Sixteen responses were received: nine from Greater Darwin and five from Central Australia. Participants could select multiple areas of concern, so percentages exceed 100%.

## Community organisations survey

This survey gathered insights from 26 organisations working with multicultural communities across the NT. It explored:

- Challenges in engaging and including people from multicultural backgrounds
- Support needed to strengthen organisational capacity and collaboration
- Areas where stronger policy or investment is needed
- The role of a multicultural peak body

Respondents represented a broad range of sectors, including community services, healthcare, education, legal services, faith-based organisations, and environmental services. Responses came from Darwin (13), NT-wide (5), Alice Springs (4), East Arnhem (1), Katherine (1), Barkly (1), and one national organisation.

## Consultations with multicultural youth

Ninety-six multicultural young people participated in a survey designed to understand their experiences of inclusion, access to services, and opportunities for participation. The survey included scaled and multiple-selection questions covering:

- Likelihood of recommending the NT as a place to live
- Sources of support when help is needed
- Desired services or supports not currently available
- Types of spaces youth wish to access more frequently
- What would improve life for multicultural youth
- What helps them feel accepted and included
- Opportunities to speak up about issues affecting their lives
- Feelings of inclusion in youth-oriented spaces (e.g. schools, workplaces, councils)

The analysis included:

- Descriptive statistics for scaled questions
- Demographic breakdowns to explore subgroup variations
- Multi-select indicator analysis to identify common priorities
- Priority order analysis to rank areas of concern
- Statistical significance testing
- Findings are indicative rather than representative, and detailed results are provided in Attachment 1: NT Multicultural Youth Survey report.

## National Policy Alliance engagement

Between April and June 2025, the NT Local Chapter – co-convened by Melaleuca and the MyNT Council – led a two-stage engagement process focused on multicultural youth.

The first stage involved a survey of 530 young people across urban and regional areas, with participation through school workshops, NT Youth Week events, and community forums. This was followed by a collaborative policy forum involving over 60 stakeholders from education, health, settlement, and community sectors.

Drawing on youth input and stakeholder dialogue, the NT Chapter refined the National Policy Alliance (NPA) themes to reflect local realities. The top three concerns identified were:

- Family violence and intergenerational conflict
- Racism and inequality in schools
- Youth settlement in regional areas

These priorities reflect the lived experiences of multicultural youth in the NT and form the foundation for locally tailored policy responses and community action. Insights from this engagement were incorporated into the thematic analysis and inform several of the report's recommendations.

# Results

This section presents findings from all data sources, organised by the NTG's three strategic priority areas and associated outcomes. Each subsection integrates insights from face-to-face community consultations, community surveys and youth surveys.

## Building our community

### Settlement growth and retention

Across all data sources, the Northern Territory is recognised as a place of ongoing multicultural growth. However, this positive trajectory is tempered by systemic barriers that continue to affect the lived experience of many residents.

Community consultation highlights persistent challenges in the migration system, the need for tailored and accessible support for new arrivals, and the importance of face-to-face services and strong community infrastructure. Leaders also emphasise the diversity of migration experiences and anticipate continued growth in specific communities.

“During COVID, some of our community members were told awful things at the supermarket, like ‘you’re a disease’ or ‘go back to China,’ even though they weren’t Chinese. It was deeply hurtful, even if only a few experienced it.”

– Community leader

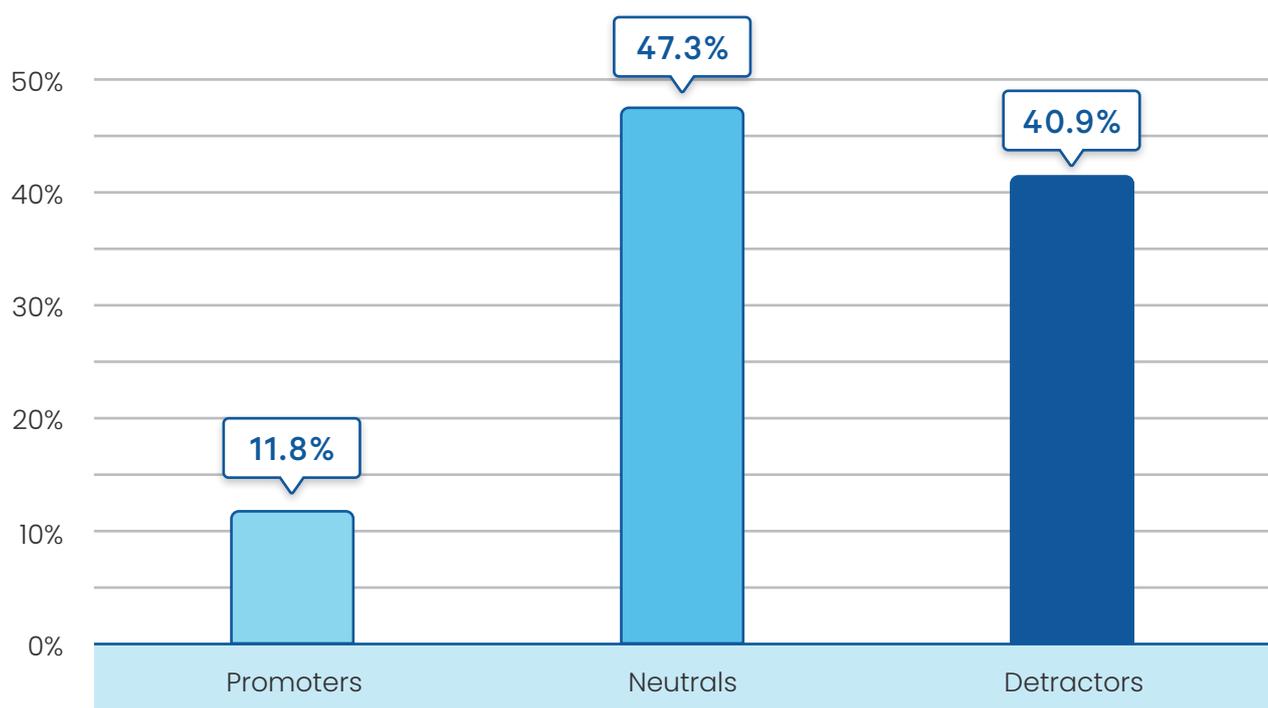
Scores are notably lower among permanent residents compared to international students, and particularly among respondents under 18 and those aged 18–24. These findings suggest that while population growth continues, perceptions of service provision and overall liveability are less favourable among younger people and those more likely to settle long-term.

Settlement growth and retention remain positive trends in the NT, but they are contingent on addressing these structural challenges. Sustained investment in culturally responsive services, coordinated planning, and community-led infrastructure will be critical to supporting integration and long-term retention.

Quantitative data from the youth survey reveals a generally negative Net Promoter Score (NPS) for the NT as a place to live (see Figure 1).

## NPS Score = -29

Figure 1. NPS distribution youth



## Settlement coordination support

Coordinated settlement support is consistently recognised as a foundation for the wellbeing and inclusion of multicultural communities in the Northern Territory.

Across all data sources, participants expressed a strong desire for more effective sector-wide coordination and advocacy. There is a clear call for a well-resourced multicultural peak body – one that can actively represent community priorities, connect leaders, deliver practical programs, and serve as a bridge across services and sectors.

Community organisations emphasise the need for collaborative infrastructure, targeted funding, culturally competent support, and reliable platforms for information sharing. Many specifically want to see stronger advocacy to government on funding, inclusion, and the integration of multicultural priorities into policy and planning.

Youth respondents highlight the importance of informal networks, with most relying on family and friends for support. This reflects both the strength of community ties and the absence of accessible, coordinated institutional pathways—particularly for young people and new arrivals.

Consultations reveal that while local leaders are active, they face entrenched barriers including language gaps, limited resources, and inconsistent support. The settlement system is frequently described as “patchy,” with under-resourced organisations stepping in to fill critical gaps. There is a clear call for sustained collaboration, community-led solutions, and system-level reforms – particularly in language access, navigation support, and integrated planning. Additionally, there is a significant need for an organisation that understands and advocates for their needs

“We are paid members of the peak body, but unfortunately we have not heard from them or received any support to connect with community members and leaders”

– Community leader

Participants in the National Policy Alliance (NPA) forum proposed a suite of practical reforms, including:

- Centralised information hubs
- Community connectors
- In-language orientation
- Expanded interpreter and liaison services
- A jointly planned NT-wide settlement strategy

Importantly, communities want to see multicultural representation embedded in governance and policymaking. There is a desire for more opportunities for community leadership, including opportunities for young people. The vision is clear: a coordinated, culturally competent, and community-driven approach to settlement that enables multicultural communities to thrive.

**In summary:** Multicultural communities across the NT are calling for stronger coordination, representation, sustained investment, and inclusive leadership to support settlement and growth. A well-resourced peak body, improved system-level planning, and culturally competent services are seen as essential to bridging gaps and enabling communities—including youth and new arrivals—to thrive.

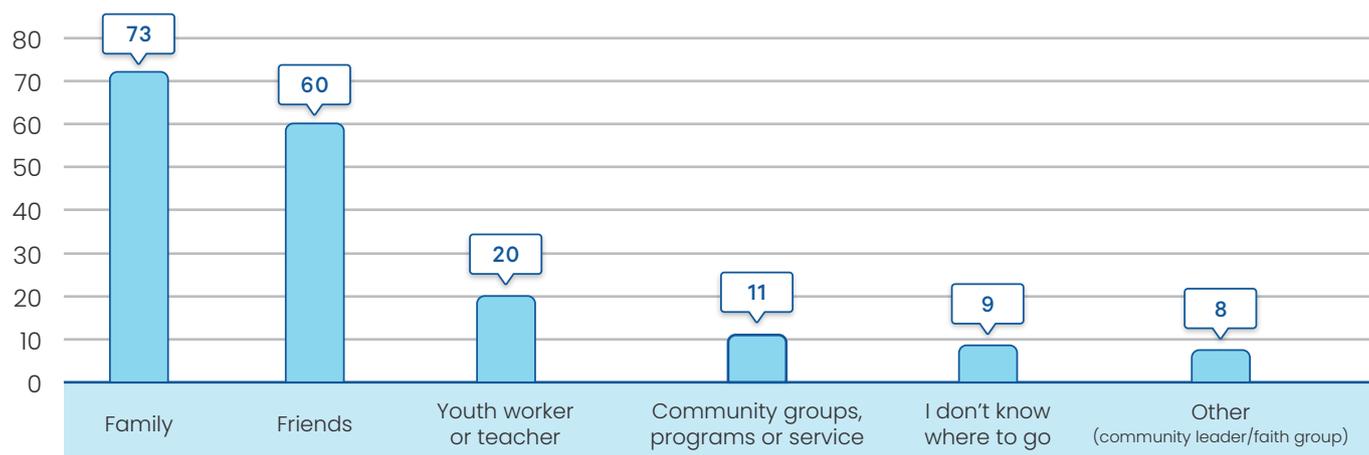


Figure 2. Where do you go when you need help?

## Wellbeing and security

### Equitable service access

Equitable access to services – particularly in health, education, justice, and employment – is a major concern across all data sources.

Community members report critical barriers that prevent full and fair participation, including language difficulties, lack of cultural understanding, and insufficient information. These issues are especially pronounced for new migrants and those on temporary visas, such as international students and working holiday makers. Unfair treatment in service systems and challenges accessing jobs and housing are recurring pain points.

Community organisations echo these concerns and advocate for more tailored service provision. There is a strong emphasis on designing services that meet the specific needs of youth, families, and older people—particularly in areas such as health, housing, and wellbeing. Recognition of overseas qualifications is also seen as essential to supporting economic independence and inclusion.

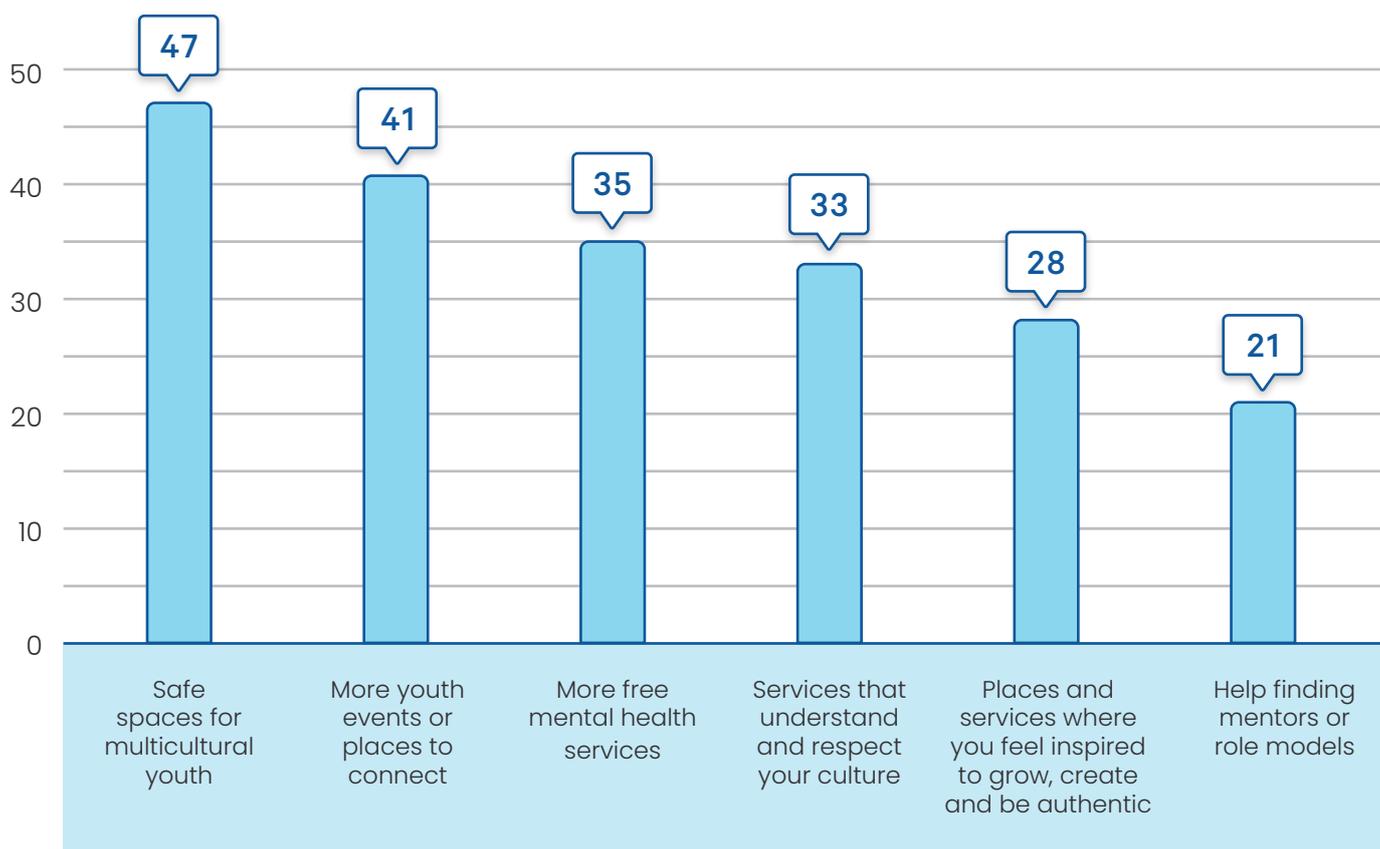
“We’re finding that many mums in the community are quite isolated and don’t have access to transport. Even though we stay connected with them, not being able to drive is a major barrier.”

– Community leader

Youth respondents call for:

- Culturally respectful, mentally safe spaces
- Free mental health services
- Community support groups
- Strong role models

Figure 3. What kinds of support or services do you wish existed in the NT?



Consultations describe current systems as inadequate and poorly aligned with community realities. Participants note that multicultural communities are especially vulnerable to rising cost-of-living pressures, including housing stress. Many report dissatisfaction with service accessibility, which contributes to disengagement and, in some cases, decisions to relocate.

There is a need for:

- Culturally specific supports
- Greater outreach
- Information delivered in accessible, familiar languages and settings

Participants in the National Policy Alliance (NPA) forum recommend bridging information gaps, improving collaboration, and embedding cultural safety into every touchpoint as a foundational approach to achieving equitable access and real inclusion. This includes:

- Improved service navigation, including in language communication and engagement
- Increased interpreter and translator resources (especially in health, justice, and education)
- Professionalised language support
- Collaborative service design

Local governments are also urged to:

- Engage directly with multicultural communities
- Deliver services in community settings
- Improve cultural responsiveness training for service providers
- Collect local demographic data to tailor solutions

**In summary:** Services must be not only available but genuinely accessible, inclusive, and co-designed with multicultural communities. Solutions such as robust interpreter pools, trusted cultural brokers, community-based outreach, and targeted investment in youth and new arrivals are widely supported. Bridging information gaps and embedding cultural safety are seen as essential to achieving real inclusion.

“Newly arrived students struggle with confusing private insurance rules. When they have emergencies, they do not know what to do. There is limited readily available information, in English and in language, to help them understand how the health system works”

– Community leader



## Economic participation

Economic participation is widely recognised as a cornerstone of wellbeing and integration across all data sources.

Community members consistently identify education and employment as top priorities, alongside the need for affordable housing, community support, and opportunities to connect across language and cultural divides.

Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with recruitment processes, noting perceptions that certain cultural backgrounds are favoured over others in the workforce. This concern is particularly acute among new migrants and those on temporary visas.

Consultations highlight a persistent mismatch between the high skill levels of many multicultural residents and the limited recognition of overseas qualifications and experience. This often results in:

- Underemployment
- Self-employment or entrepreneurship as alternatives to systemic workforce barriers

While some established communities report fewer employment concerns, new arrivals, students, and those with insecure visa status face significant challenges. Barriers to workforce entry include language difficulties, lack of local work experience, and exclusionary hiring practices. These issues are especially pronounced for those entering the Australian job market for the first time or seeking to re-enter their professional fields.

“Many community members have reported suffering work exploitation due to need and lack of information on lawful work rights”  
Vietnamese community leader

“The Multicultural NT ten-year strategy briefly mentions work, but doesn’t highlight practical opportunities, like employment pathways. Also, for migrants trying to find jobs, not having referees is a major challenge.”

– Community leader

“Some skilled migrants miss out on job opportunities, not because they lack experience, but because they don’t have local connections. As a result, we’re losing valuable talent to other sectors. A common example is people on working holiday visas taking jobs unrelated to their skills, simply because they can’t access their field.”

– Community leader



Youth respondents ranked “feeling accepted in schools, workplaces or services ” and “help finding jobs or training” as the top two factors that would most improve their lives in the NT—underscoring the importance of inclusive economic opportunities.

NPA forum participants propose practical, community-driven solutions:

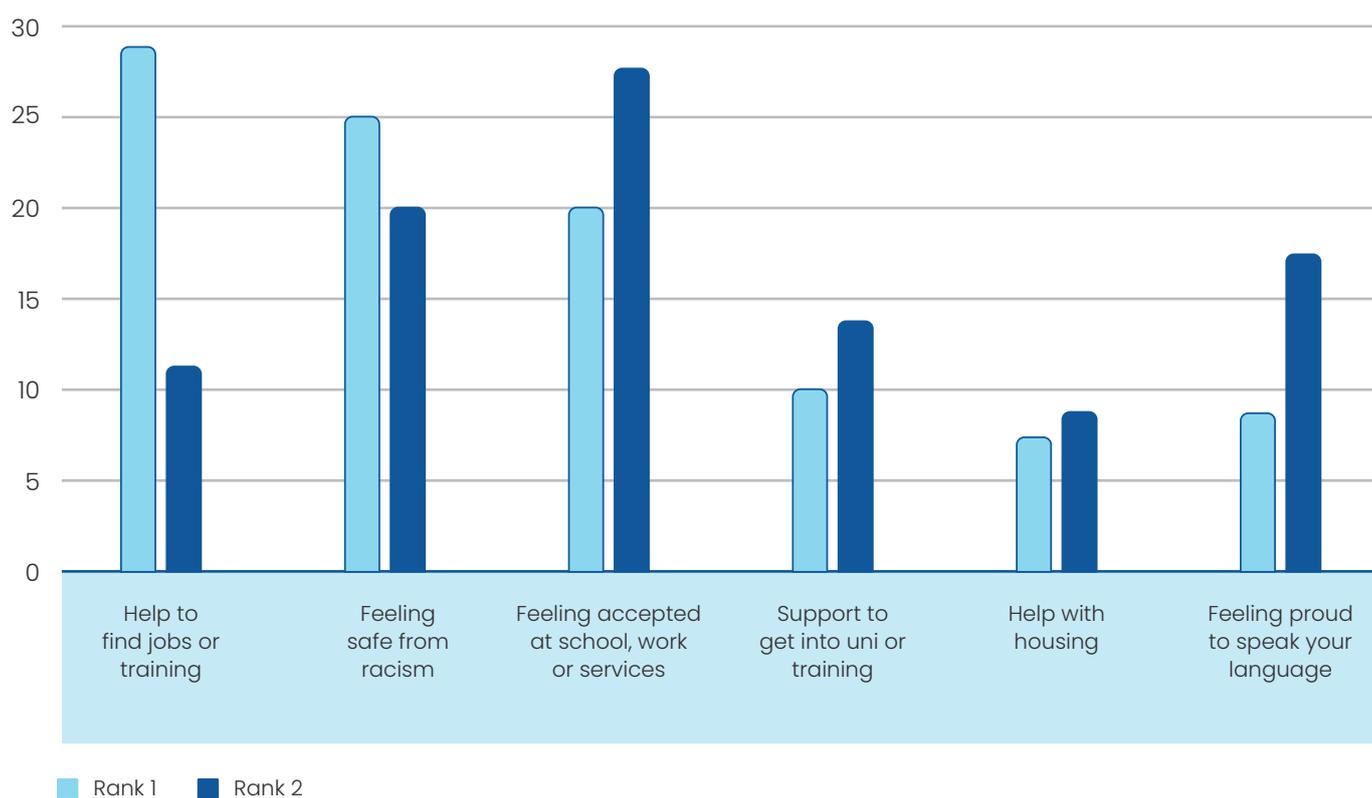
- Employment Hubs for job readiness and mentoring
- Tailored driving education
- Skills development for navigating the job market and broader systems

The forum showed a widespread call for more targeted support, including job readiness programs, recognition of overseas qualifications, and clear pathways to local work experience. Some proposed community-driven events and programs to support this were:

- Creating safe, respectful environments for community members including young people
- Embedding equity and safety into all aspects of settlement and economic participation

**In summary:** Unlocking the economic potential of multicultural communities requires systemic reforms (e.g. credential recognition, anti-discrimination measures) and grassroots supports (e.g. mentoring, job readiness, entrepreneurial pathways). Addressing these barriers will enable full participation and benefit the broader NT economy.

Figure 4. What would make life better for multicultural youth in the NT? Rank 1 and 2



## Social cohesion and lifestyle

### Respect and safety

Across all sources, respect and safety are regarded as essential for wellbeing and inclusion among multicultural communities and young people in the NT.

Community members most closely link respect and safety to feeling welcome across life settings, freedom from racism or judgment, and the ability to express their language, culture, and faith. Kindness, understanding, and opportunities to connect in culturally familiar spaces also rate highly as determinants of respect and safety.

Community leaders emphasised that community members continue to experience significant challenges, including:

- Discrimination in housing and employment
- Online and in-person threats
- Need for culturally sensitive policing
- Community events and gatherings to foster mutual respect and safety.

For youth respondents, the most pressing barriers to genuine feelings of inclusion are racism and discrimination, not being listened to, and language barriers. Others are shown in Figure 5:



Figure 5. What makes it harder for multicultural youth to feel safe or supported?

The NPA Youth Survey reveals significant safety concerns among multicultural young people, particularly at home and in schools. Family violence and intergenerational conflict were identified as the top issue by 249 respondents, followed by racism, cultural insensitivity, and unequal treatment in education settings, cited by 184 participants. These experiences have a direct impact on young people's mental health, sense of belonging, and overall wellbeing.

Multicultural organisations and the NPA forum informed pathways for solutions centred on anti-racism education, accountability, and inclusive, culturally and trauma-informed services.

From an education standpoint this should include:

- Curriculum innovation celebrating diversity
- Targeted teacher training in cultural sensitivity

**In summary:** Achieving genuine respect and safety requires co-designed, trauma-informed services and settings, anti-racism mechanisms, diverse leadership, and accessible spaces for cultural expression. Communities seek not just protection from harm, but environments where inclusion and belonging are actively cultivated.

## Multicultural community engagement

Across multicultural community leaders, community organisations, community members and young people, there is a strong desire for multicultural communities to be more actively involved in decision-making and policy development.

Community members consistently call for more frequent and ongoing consultation—not only during times of crisis, but as a regular part of service planning and delivery.

There is a clear emphasis on inclusive engagement, with participants advocating for the involvement of both youth and elders, greater support for community leaders, and more opportunities for cultural exchange and collaboration.

Organisations report persistent barriers to effective engagement, including limited funding, capacity constraints, and a lack of practical support. Challenges include adapting programs to meet diverse needs, co-designing with multicultural communities, and accessing essential resources such as interpreters and translated materials. Many also highlight the need for clearer guidance, mentorship, and improved collaboration, as well as difficulties recruiting staff with experience navigating foundational Australian services.

Youth respondents also reflect these concerns and express a need for:

- More opportunities to speak up about issues affecting their lives
- Platforms where their voices are valued and acted upon
- Youth-led initiatives and leadership development

Consultations with community groups and community leaders reveal that engagement is most effective when it is ongoing, coordinated, and community led. Nevertheless, participants affirm they are often ad hoc, under-resourced, or inaccessible to many communities. There is a clear call for:

- Systematic, ongoing engagement
- Inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives in governance
- Support for community associations and leaders to participate meaningfully

Community organisations and local leaders play a vital role in supporting multicultural communities – often stepping in where government services fall short. They provide informal settlement support, organise cultural events, and assist individuals in accessing housing, employment, and social networks.

Despite their impact, these organisations operate with limited resources, inadequate venues, and without formal recognition.

Community leaders want to see the NT Government engage with existing community organisations, building on the work they are already doing and supporting them with funding, infrastructure, and collaboration. They believe such partnerships are key to greater cultural responsiveness, better meeting local needs, and improving the sustainability of community supports.

**In summary:** Multicultural engagement must move beyond tokenism to genuine inclusion. This means creating consistent, well-supported pathways for communities to shape decisions, policies, and services that affect their lives.



## Diversity as identity

Participants across all groups view cultural diversity as a strength and a defining feature of the Northern Territory's identity. There is a shared aspiration to see diversity celebrated, protected, and embedded in everyday life.

Community members highlight the importance of:

- Cultural expression through language, faith, and tradition
- Events and festivals that showcase multicultural heritage
- Education that reflects and respects diverse histories and contributions

They express pride in their cultural backgrounds but also note pressures to assimilate or hide aspects of their identity (see below Figure 6).

Community leaders, community members and young people all express a desire to feel happy, accepted and safe. They want to feel that they belong and are integrated into the NT's identity. They want diversity to be visible across all aspects of community life, including the neighbourhoods in which they live. There is a desire for opportunities for cultural exchange, and mutual respect in all aspects of community life

Multicultural communities reinforce the idea that diversity should be visible and valued, not just tolerated. Participants advocate for:

- Public messaging that affirms multiculturalism
- Cultural competency across institutions
- Support for inter-community collaboration and solidarity

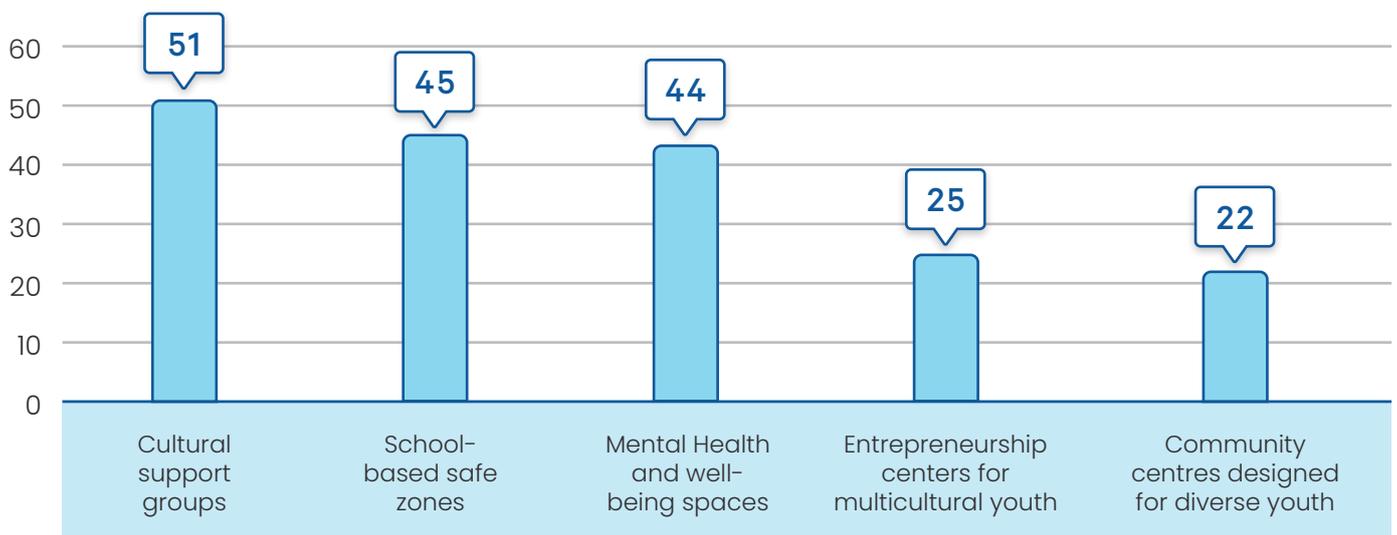
"A community member recently asked me something after we lost someone. They said, 'We have our own ways of saying goodbye, but local funeral services don't really accommodate that.' It made me think, maybe it's something we need to work by ourselves as a community"

– Community leader

Consultations and youth feedback further underscore the emotional significance of feeling safe, accepted, and welcome in diverse neighbourhoods. Positive experiences with neighbours from different backgrounds, opportunities for cultural exchange, and inclusive attitudes are all seen as vital to fostering a sense of community belonging. There is a clear desire for kindness, equality, and mutual respect in local environments.

**In summary:** Diversity is not only a demographic reality but a source of strength and identity. Communities want to see it reflected in policy, education, public spaces, and leadership—affirming that multiculturalism is central to the NT's future.

Figure 6. What type of spaces would you like to have frequent or free access to?



# Key issues & opportunities

The research reveals consistent themes across all consultation methods and stakeholder groups. These themes align with the NTG's strategic priorities and highlight both systemic challenges and opportunities for reform.

“Most of our kids go to local schools, but they still feel different, and look upon differently. When we raise concerns, schools often don't know how to respond. I've experienced this with my own child. I asked the school about the racial bullying and what training their teachers have. Because when something happens, kids turn to their teachers for safety and support.”

– Community leader

## Cross-cutting themes

- **Language and communication:** Language barriers are a recurring issue across services, employment, and engagement. Limited English proficiency, particularly for newly arrived migrants and refugees, emerged as a key barrier to access foundational services. There is a strong need for professionalised interpreter services, multilingual outreach, and culturally competent communication.
- **Access and inclusion:** Services must be designed with and for multicultural communities. This includes co-design, outreach, and tailored supports that reflect lived experiences.
- **Youth empowerment:** Young people face unique challenges but also offer powerful insights and leadership potential. Investment in youth-led initiatives and culturally safe spaces is essential.
- **Community leadership and representation:** Community leaders play a vital role but require support, recognition, and inclusion in governance and planning.
- **System coordination:** Fragmented systems create gaps in support. A coordinated, Territory-wide approach to settlement, inclusion, and service delivery is needed.

## Subtheme nuances

- Specific communities face distinct challenges, such as deaf identity in NT schools or faith-based discrimination. These require targeted responses within broader frameworks.
- Program continuity and overlap suggest opportunities for integrated planning across sectors and life stages.

## Developmental stages and multi-level impact

- Outcomes are conceptualised across individual, family, and community levels.
- The social ecological model provides a useful framework for understanding how change at one level supports outcomes at others.

## Community-level impact

- While less frequently mentioned, community-level change is a key enabler for individual and family wellbeing.
- Increasing support and accessibility at the community level is essential for sustainable, inclusive outcomes.

# NTG strategic alignment and targeted response areas

