



**Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
Young People**

YOUNG AND WISE ROUNDTABLE REPORT
2026

8 Cohort 3: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People

Cohort snapshot

20 PARTICIPANTS	49 APPLICANTS	2 SESSIONS	April 2026 CONDUCTED
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How we ran this

Facilitators drew on the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network's (2026) Language Matters: Belonging and Inclusion – What young people think about CALD vs CARM to inform the roundtable framing and ensure ARACY was guided by young people’s language preferences. MYAN supported this work by advising on terminology and reviewing the roundtable questions before the sessions. Participants were invited to use whichever terms felt right to them, with facilitators following their lead on language throughout the discussion.

Who participated

Approximately 20 young people participated across two sessions. The cohort reflected a diversity of gender identities, sexual orientations, and intersecting lived experiences. Participants were drawn from multiple Australian states and territories.

Participant demographics across the two sessions held, were as follows:

	Group: Under 18 group	Group: 18 and over group
Date	Apr 21, 2026	Apr 20, 2026
Participants	11	9
Age range	10–17 years	18–24 years
States / territories	NSW (3), VIC (2), QLD (2), WA (2), SA (2)	VIC (4), NSW (2), QLD (2), ACT (1)
Intersecting identities	LGBTIQA+ (1) ND (1) RRR (1), migrant/refugee) Migrant/ refugee backgrounds (1)	LGBTIQA+ (1) ND (1) RRR (1) Migrant/ refugee backgrounds (2)

Named participants (Under 18): Ely, Eton, Bhuvika, Hania, Ananya, Shraddha, Serena, Fatima, Ariba, Abinav, Similian.

Named participants (18 and over): Chris, Sankara, Alex, Elvis, Varsha, Neerja, Immaculate, and participants who chose to remain fully de-identified.

NB: Some participant names reflect preferred names, nicknames, or aliases used during the sessions rather than legal names recorded at EOI stage.

Scope and limitations

Limitations that apply across all Series 2 cohorts are set out at 2.7 Limitations and considerations. The points below are specific to this cohort. The CALD population is not a monolith: participants included first-generation migrants, second- and third-generation Australians, and young people from refugee backgrounds. Findings reflect those intersections and should not be attributed to any single cultural, linguistic or migration background.

EOI applicants were asked to select their areas of wellbeing interest before applying. Positive Sense of Identity and Culture and Valued, Loved and Safe were most frequently selected. Yet in discussion, mental health access, systemic racism, housing, and employment emerged with equal force. This is consistent with what ARACY observed across Series 2: wellbeing is reframed when trust is established through conversation.

Based on CALD EOI responses, the wellbeing domains most frequently selected were:

Rank	The Nest Domain	Frequency (qualitative)
1	Positive Sense of Identity and Culture	Most frequent
2	Valued, Loved and Safe	Most frequent
3	Participating	Frequent
4	Learning	Frequent
5	Healthy	Moderate
6	Material Basics	Less frequent

Note: Exact percentages not shown; this table reflects qualitative ranking of EOI frequency. Individuals could select multiple domains.

Key messages



The short version: Across two sessions, 20 young CALD people arrived with clear understanding of what holds them back. They described navigating education, healthcare and community life while managing cultural expectations, language barriers, family pressures and systems that too often treat diversity as performance. Their strongest message was that diversity without accountability is not enough. They are not asking for token recognition, but for systems that respond to racism, provide culturally and linguistically safe support, recognise family and settlement pressures, and include CALD young people in paid roles to help design and lead change.

Six clear messages from CALD young people

Six themes emerged across both sessions. Findings should be read as indicative lived-experience signals rather than representative results.

	Problem statement	Roundtable insights
1	School inclusion efforts are not consistently translating into safe and inclusive learning environments.	Cultural diversity was often celebrated symbolically, but everyday experiences of racism and stereotyping persisted. Some participants described being placed in language-support classes based on assumptions about their background rather than assessed need.
2	Mental health services are not consistently culturally safe or accessible for CALD young people.	Mental health services were rated poorly for cultural safety. Language barriers, stigma, limited trust and culturally mismatched approaches reduced access, even where services were available.
3	CALD young people face barriers to belonging, identity and participation.	Balancing expectations across family, culture, education and work affected belonging and identity. Exclusionary student groups, Eurocentric curricula, assumptions about identity and family responsibilities further limited participation.
4	Parent and caregiver wellbeing is not adequately recognised as a determinant of young people's wellbeing.	Settlement stress, financial pressure, homesickness, limited support and intergenerational trauma affected families. Participants emphasised that supporting young people also requires supporting parents and caregivers.
5	Health education does not adequately reflect culturally diverse experiences.	Conflicting messages about alcohol, vaping and drugs from families, communities, peers, media and schools created confusion. Participants wanted safe, non-judgemental opportunities to discuss these issues and access reliable information.
6	Digital policies do not fully account for the role of online spaces in connection and belonging.	Social media supported identity exploration, <u>advocacy</u> and connection with culturally similar peers. Restrictions on digital access were seen as reducing opportunities for connection unless accompanied by safe and credible alternatives.

The broader Young and Wise 2026 Survey findings reinforce several of these themes. Survey respondents identified youth-specialist physical and mental health care, food and cost-of-living support, bullying being properly dealt with, not feeling included or respected, and meaningful participation as major priorities. While the survey was completed by a separate group of young people and is not representative of CALD young people, it indicates that many issues raised in the CALD roundtables also have wider salience.

What young people are telling us and where this aligns nationally

What CALD participants told us across the roundtables closely reflects what young people are saying nationally. The Young and Wise Report shows that thriving depends on a set of connected conditions: feeling safe, having strong relationships, being able to access support, and having a genuine say in decisions that affect their lives (Young and Wise, 2024, p.20–23). Several patterns in that evidence base reinforce the CALD findings directly.

Belonging is foundational, and CALD participants showed real skill in navigating it. A sense of belonging, to peers, family and community, is strongly linked to wellbeing, but declines as young people get older (Young and Wise, 2024, p.12). CALD participants described actively managing dual or multiple cultural, institutional and generational expectations at once, a skill that speaks to real adaptive capacity; under-18 participants scored school belonging at 3.0 out of 5, suggesting schools have room to better support what these young people are already working hard to build.

Young people are clear-eyed about where safety and inclusion still need to catch up to intent. Bullying remains a persistent issue nationally, with clear impacts on wellbeing and learning (Young and Wise, 2024, p.56–58), and young people who are CALD, First Nations, LGBTIQ+ or living with disability are more likely to report lower safety and higher exposure to discrimination (Young and Wise, 2024, p.52). CALD participants named this precisely: schools have shown real strength in celebrating diversity through events like Harmony Day, but follow-through when racism or discrimination is actually raised is less consistent, a distinction these young people were well placed to make.

Mental health sits at the centre of young people's experience, and CALD participants are actively building their own pathways to support. Mental health is closely tied to school pressure and life transitions nationally, and young people consistently call for earlier, more practical support (Young and Wise, 2024, p.12; p.16). CALD participants described navigating this thoughtfully within family contexts where help-seeking isn't always framed the same way, and pointed specifically to language access and cultural safety as what would make services actually work for them.

Access to services depends on cost, confidentiality and trust, and CALD young people can identify exactly what's missing. Nationally, young people identify cost, transport, confidentiality and trust as the main factors shaping whether they seek support (Young and Wise, 2024, p.14). CALD participants added real precision to this: language access and cultural fit as concrete, addressable gaps, rating health services below 2.5 out of 5 on cultural safety measures.

Young people want real influence, not token consultation, and CALD participants said so directly. Nationally, young people are clear that they want to see how their input changes outcomes, and to be actively involved in decisions that affect them (Young and Wise, 2024, p.6; p.14). CALD participants asked for exactly this: accountability for racism and discrimination alongside recognition of diversity, and genuine follow-through rather than performance.

Key insights from the roundtables

Schools and Education

Across both groups, school was described as a space that acknowledges cultural diversity in principle but can struggle to enact it in practice.

Did you have school lessons, workshops or guest speakers on these wellbeing topics? How helpful were they in helping you make good decisions?

(1 = Didn't help / Didn't receive, 5 = Helped me a lot)

Topic	Average score		
	Under 18 (n=11)	18+ (n=8)	Young and Wise 2026 Survey (n=192)
Digital safety and wellbeing	2.73	2.63	2.73
Managing Mental Health	2.82	2.75	2.74
Nutrition	2.73	2.38	2.77
Physical Health	3.55	3.25	3.46
Preventing Racism and Discrimination	2.64	2.38	2.7
Respectful Relationships	2.73	3.38	3.15
Sexual Health	2.18	2.63	3.15
Substances	2.73	2.38	3.03

Note: Sexual Health and Respectful Relationships were asked separately in the roundtables. The Young and Wise 2026 Survey combined them into one item, so the same survey score (3.15) appears on both rows.

Note: Indicative only. Small sample. Copied verbatim from the Mentimeter weighted average.

Physical health rated highest in both groups. Sexual health rated lowest for the under-18 group. Mental health and racism prevention rated low across both. In discussion, participants were clear: ratings reflect not just content quality, but whether it reached them at all.

School culture and belonging

Participants rated how well their school served CALD students. Scale 1–5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree).

Statement	Average score	
	Under 18 (n=8)	18+ (n=8)
My school recognises and supports the cultural and linguistic diversity of students	3.6	3.2
My school makes me feel like I belong (combating racism/discrimination)	3	2.8
My school helps my parents and carers feel included	3.4	2.8
My school teaches things in a way that makes sense for my culture and language(s)	2.8	2.6
Teachers and school leaders consider students of all cultural backgrounds when making decisions	3.4	2.4

The under-18 group scored their schools consistently higher than the 18+ group. The sharpest gap was in school leadership considering cultural backgrounds (3.4 vs 2.4), a pattern consistent with discussion, where 18+ participants described more systemic and deeply embedded experiences of exclusion.



School Supports, Cultural Safety and Representation

Participants were asked to identify the top three ideas that would help schools better support the wellbeing of CALD students. In the 18+ group 'dot vote', more wellbeing staff at school, including counsellors, nurses and youth workers, received the highest number of votes.

Participants also prioritised teacher training, visible safe spaces or cultural student groups, and school environments where bullying, racism and discrimination are clearly addressed.

Idea	Votes 18+ (n=9)
More wellbeing staff at school (counsellors, nurses, youth workers)	7
Better teacher training to spot wellbeing needs and respond well	4
Visible safe spaces or student groups at school (e.g. cultural groups)	4
Safer school environments where bullying, racism and discrimination is	4
Extra funding for schools to provide inclusive wellbeing supports	3
More subjects and local career pathways	2
Stronger partnerships with community and families (including cultural support)	2
Faster access to outside support services through school	1

Note: 18+ group dot vote, n=9. Participants selected their top three ideas. Indicative only.

The results suggest that participants saw school wellbeing as both a workforce and culture issue. While more wellbeing staff was the highest priority, participants also emphasised the need for staff capability, culturally safe support, visible spaces for belonging, and consistent responses to racism, bullying and discrimination.

Symbolic inclusion and practical follow-through

Participants described a gap between schools recognising cultural diversity through events or displays, and responding effectively when racism or discrimination occurred. Their comments suggest that diversity recognition is most meaningful when accompanied by clear processes, staff confidence and visible follow-through.



"I think schools are very good at, I guess, celebrating or showcasing diversity. But I think when it gets to a point of if something bad happens, let's say it's a, I don't know, someone's being discriminated against, or whether it's racism, they find it really hard to deal with those type of things and they kind of just like crush it under the rug..."

— Immaculate, CALD Roundtable 18+

The Young and Wise 2026 Survey findings reinforce the importance of schools as wellbeing settings. Across the broader survey, young people prioritised clearer subject choices and pathways after school, bullying being properly dealt with, access to counsellors, wellbeing staff or GPs, better routines, and free or affordable healthy food as changes that would improve school wellbeing. This aligns with CALD participants' accounts of schools as places where wellbeing depends not only on curriculum, but on whether racism, stereotyping and exclusion are addressed consistently in practice.

The survey highlights school wellbeing as a broad youth priority, while the CALD roundtables show that for culturally diverse young people, school wellbeing is inseparable from anti-racism, representation, language assumptions and whether inclusion is enacted rather than performed.

Assumptions, stereotyping and support allocation

Participants also described situations where students were assumed to need particular supports because of their appearance, cultural background or perceived migration status, rather than through individual assessment. These accounts point to the importance of ensuring that language, learning and wellbeing supports are based on assessed need, not assumptions about identity or background.



"Unfortunately, in my school... I think they had a class in something to do with English as a second language. So the idea was to help people from refugee and immigrant backgrounds to, you know, be able to be caught up. But they had a habit (I was in a country town area) of sort of just placing anyone who looked different in that group, whether you had actually informed the school that, yes, I've just come to Australia... because of that, a lot of students were actually falling behind when they didn't need to be because the school was deliberately targeting First Nations kids and multicultural kids into programmes that were not suited to their reading levels..."

- A participant, CALD Roundtable 18+ (de-identified at their request)



"I wonder if we have somehow normalised the idea that if you are from a CALD background or you look like you are from a CALD background, then you are assumed to be an international student. There is nothing wrong with being an international student, but it feels like many people make that assumption straight away, especially in school settings, even if you are like 2nd or 3rd generational"

- Chris, CALD Roundtable 18+ Chat

Representation in staffing, school culture and curriculum

Participants identified representation as an important contributor to safety, trust and belonging. This included seeing cultural diversity reflected in school staff, wellbeing roles, classroom content and everyday learning activities. Participants valued small but visible forms of recognition, while also calling for broader curriculum approaches that moved beyond Eurocentric content and reflected a more global understanding of culture, history and identity.



“When you see yourself in the staff at your school, it can really support with feeling safe and vulnerable with what you may be struggling with that is culturally specific, particularly wellbeing staff.”

— Elvis, CALD Roundtable 18+ Chat



“... I did food technology in year 9 and 10 and I really like agree that my school does recognise like the different backgrounds of everyone because some of the food that we made was like, it ranged from like tacos to spaghetti to, one day we even made biryani ... I feel like small things like that just like are so important and so crucial.”

— Ariba, CALD Roundtable Under 18



“In the curriculum, I feel like it's really Eurocentric. Having the curriculum in high school and primary school and more global focus, where we do focus on Europe and Australian history and Asia and ...like culture and geography, all the subjects basically. I feel like that'd be really beneficial.”

— Bhuvika, CALD Roundtable Under 18



What this means for policy: Participants' responses suggest that supporting CALD student wellbeing requires both additional wellbeing capacity and more culturally responsive school environments. Policy priorities include increasing access to wellbeing staff, strengthening teacher capability to identify and respond to wellbeing needs, ensuring racism and discrimination are addressed consistently, and providing safe spaces where students can build belonging. Participants also highlighted the importance of avoiding assumptions based on appearance, language or perceived migration status, and ensuring that support is based on assessed need. This reinforces that CALD communities are not a homogeneous group; young people's experiences, strengths and support needs are shaped by a range of intersecting factors and can vary considerably across and within communities. Representation in staffing, curriculum and everyday school practices was seen as an important contributor to trust, safety and inclusion, underscoring the need for flexible and responsive approaches rather than one-size-fits-all solutions.

Healthcare and Mental Wellbeing Access

Mental health was the most discussed topic across both sessions. Participants described compounding barriers: family stigma, a lack of shared vocabulary to discuss mental health at home, culturally mismatched services, and professionals who sometimes reinforced rather than challenged those barriers.

The broader Young and Wise 2026 Survey findings reinforce the importance of health and wellbeing access. Survey respondents identified healthcare teams specialising in young people's physical and mental health as the highest investment priority, and ranked mental and physical health as the top issue parents and caregivers should focus on. This supports the CALD roundtable findings that mental health is central to wellbeing, while the cohort data shows that access depends on cultural safety, trust, language, confidentiality and family context.

Health services and culture

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements about health and wellbeing services. Scale 1–5 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The findings are presented from high to low by the 18+ participants. These questions focused on whether participants felt supported, respected and included by health services, rather than on their capacity to navigate and access the healthcare system more broadly; participants were not asked whether they felt equipped to find, understand and access appropriate services, or what barriers they faced in doing so. Findings here should be interpreted as reflecting experiences of service engagement, not a comprehensive assessment of healthcare access.

Statement	Average score	
	U18 (n=8)	18+ (n=6)
I can access support in a way that works for me (translation, lived experience practitioner)	2.3	2.2
I trust that health services will recognise my cultural/linguistic identity when engaging with me	2.9	2.2
My health services understand and respect my cultural and linguistic identity/ies	2.5	2
Health services in my area make young people from all cultures feel welcome	3.1	1.8
My health services inform my parents or carers and include them in what's going on	3.5	1.7

Note: Scale 1–5. Indicative only; not statistically valid. The 18+ group rated cultural safety in health services markedly lower across every measure.

The 18+ group rated every health service measure below 2.5, indicating widespread disagreement that current services are culturally safe or accessible. The lowest-rated item was 'health services in my area...feel welcome' (1.8), which is near the floor of the scale. The under-18 group scored higher across the board, potentially reflecting more limited healthcare interaction to date.

What would be helpful — talking about mental health

Participants ranked what helps or would help them talk about their mental health. Both groups ranked the same item first and third.

Rank	Under 18	18+
1	Feeling safe to speak honestly without fear of judgement or consequences	Feeling safe to speak honestly without fear of judgement or consequences
2	Using everyday language rather than naming clinical terms	Involving someone you both trust
3	Explaining wellbeing in a way that aligns with culture or values (including faith)	Explaining wellbeing in a way that aligns with culture or values (including faith)

Mental health as a 'Western' concept

Both groups produced Mentimetre word clouds on how mental health is talked about in their family or community. Key responses:

18+ Mentimetre responses

Terms used
"It's not."
"Limited."
"Lots of vagueness and excuses."
"Seen as weakness and illness."
"Shaming."
"Taboo."
"You are immediately pigeonholed into a certain stereotype."
"You need to get over it."
"Stress isn't real, more so an excuse."

Under 18 Mentimetre responses

Terms used

"Should be maintained well but not talked about daily."

"It's not."

"Not more than stress."

"Seen as a weakness, something people who are weak have."

"I talk to my older siblings who understand it more."

"Talked about but not something I feel is allowed to happen to me."



"...it's kind of like a white people thing to go into a psychologist. It's a lot of that... there are like certain traits or characteristics which are just very normalized. ... if then I'm like having similar traits as another person in my family, that's also not taken seriously...And I think that creates this weird like toxic cycle..."

— Varsha, CALD Roundtable 18+



"...my GP was the same background as me and would bond with my family over not believing my mental health rather than actually doing their job as a doctor. I have one GP and I'm like 'I will always go to you even if you're an hour away'. Just purely because like I've had so many bad experiences."

— Varsha, CALD Roundtable 18+



"I've had GPs who have just like assumed. that like I was being dramatic... I've had someone who was of a different multicultural background from me, kind of just, just straight off the bat sort of like, 'Do you need me to just sign this and get you an extension for your work?'...they kind of just straight away, didn't really do any physical examination, didn't really want to entertain the conversation."

— Deidentified, CALD Roundtable 18+

Social Media, Digital Safety and Digital Connection

Social media and online platforms were described as both important sources of connection and potential sources of risk for CALD young people. For some participants, digital spaces provided access to peers, advocacy opportunities, identity exploration and communities with shared cultural experience. Under-18 participants raised concerns that the social media age restriction may have reduced access to these forms of connection without providing clear alternatives.

Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements about the social media age restriction on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The 18+ Mentimeter activity showed no responses recorded for this question, so the results below reflect under-18 participants only.

Statement	Under 18 (n=8)	Young and Wise 2026 Survey (n=155)
I feel safer online (less bullying or conflict)	1.6	2.3
I feel great without the big age-restricted apps	2	2.7
I have found new ways to spend my time (hobbies, sport, friends IRL)	2	2.6
It's harder to find the mental health support I need	2.8	2.7
I can still stay connected with my friends online	3	3.3
It's harder to meet new people or find communities that share my interests	3.4	2.8

Note: Scale 1–5, where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Roundtable results are from under-18 CALD participants only (n=8) and are indicative only, not statistically representative; the 18+ Mentimeter activity showed no responses recorded.

Survey results are from the Young and Wise 2026 Survey (n=155 for this question), a separate data source completed by a broader group of young people aged 8 to 25, including those not directly affected by the age restriction. Survey statement wording differs slightly from the roundtable wording. Survey results are not disaggregated by cohort.

The under-18 responses suggest that participants did not strongly associate the age restriction with feeling safer online, with this statement receiving the lowest average score at 1.6 out of 5. Participants also tended to disagree that they felt better without major age-restricted apps or had found new ways to spend their time, both scoring 2.0. By contrast, the highest-rated statement was that it had become harder to meet new people or find communities with shared interests, at 3.4. Overall, these responses suggest that, for this small group, the social media age restriction may be experienced less as a protective measure and more as a barrier to connection, particularly where online spaces play an important role in finding culturally relevant peers, support and community.



“...I am over 16 now, so it didn't actually affect me. But under 16s were, like, even if their account was blocked, they just made another one and they didn't actually have to check their ID of something because they just made up a fake birthday.”

— Shraddha, CALD Roundtable Under 18



“if people are experiencing cyber bullying through social media or if they do encounter any issues online, then now they're no longer going to go ask for help because ... they're worried that it will be flipped on them and that they'll get in trouble and be punished as a result of it. And then also from an advocacy perspective...most people have less of an opportunity or like time wise to actually go into advocacy to look into what they can do to make a difference. And as a result, I think we're losing so many like young voices and the perspectives of students on really important issues.”

— Serena, CALD Roundtable Under 18

Broader Young and Wise 2026 Survey findings add useful context to this concern. Survey respondents did not strongly agree that social media age restrictions made them feel safer online, and responses also pointed to ongoing issues around connection, mental health support and finding communities. This aligns with CALD participants' view that online spaces can be important pathways to advocacy, peer support and culturally relevant connection, particularly where offline alternatives are limited.



What this means for policy: Participants' responses suggest that digital safety measures should be evaluated not only for their protective intent, but also for their effects on connection, belonging and access to support among young people who may have limited offline alternatives.

Wellbeing in the Middle Years (Under 18)

Under-18 participants described academic pressure, belonging, and the challenge of holding dual identities as key wellbeing concerns.



"...currently a lot of academics and grades and like... your ATAR are being really prioritized. And I think valuing social and life skills is something that's going to increase student wellbeing... Like maths, you can learn in school, but... skills like budgeting, again, social connections. I think it's really important even moving beyond your school."

— Fatima, CALD Roundtable Under 18



"Me personally, I'm very grateful to go to a school that has a sort of university style to its teaching and learning. So they have a very good approach in terms of dealing with bullying, harassment, sort of very strict zero tolerance policies to do with any sort of breach of that...it really does help support kids of all different types of cultural backgrounds... And I think not just that strictness, but then that sort of promotes a really good school culture in terms of the school is able to effectively deal with any instances or problems...."

— Abinav, CALD Roundtable Under 18

Rank	What would most improve your wellbeing at school
1	Feeling safe at school (bullying dealt with properly)
2	Better routines at school (phone rules, brain breaks, sleep-friendly timetables)
3	Easy access to <u>counsellors</u> / wellbeing staff / GPs
4	Help with homework (clubs / tutoring / less overload)
5	More structured peer support (mates helping mates)
6	Free / cheap and nutritious breakfast, lunch and snacks

Community, Belonging and Funding

Participants described belonging as hard-won and fragile. Community connections were important, but access was uneven.



"...at my university, our club culture is very competitive...you need to fit into this stereotype...some clubs actually make you submit a resume, pretty much do job interviews for them...you need to fit this stereotype basically, or else you're not in it."

— Chris, CALD Roundtable 18+



"...putting a third space with that has primary resources, so things like English skills, like homework help, those sort of things. And a third space where it's like you can have like, Headspace is good, but...again, they do specialise only on one type of cultural safety and it's more First Nations related. So it doesn't really help...multicultural young people..."

— Deidentified, CALD Roundtable 18+



"More funding towards sports clubs and sports grants for people from low SES backgrounds."

— Sankara, CALD Roundtable 18+ Chat



Parents and Caregivers

Both groups showed deep empathy for parents and carers. Young people were acutely aware of the pressures on their families and did not want to add to them.

Question 1 — what should parents and caregivers focus on most?

Participants ranked what parents and caregivers should focus on most. The average rankings for each group are shown below.

Focus area	Average ranking	
	Under 18 (n=7)	18+ (n=8)
Education (quality, support, workload, pathways)	2.5 ▲	3.9
Mental and physical health	2.7 ▲	2.5 ▲
Family relationships (including conflict or stress)	3.7	3.2 ▲
Chances to have a say and be listened to	4.3	4.1
Friendships and belonging	4.4	4.8
Discrimination, harassment and bullying	4.5	5.6
Money stress (affording to join in)	6.3	5.1
Rapidly changing technology (AI and social media)	6.8	6.8

1 = most important, 8 = least important. ▲ = top two for each group. Under 18 n=7; 18+ n=8. Not everyone who attended the roundtable completed this ranking. Indicative only.

Mental and physical health topped the ranking in both groups. The 18+ group ranked education third (second for under-18s), reflecting the educational pressure and systemic barriers tertiary-age CALD young people face at once. Both groups ranked technology last.

Question 2 — Thinking about your parents and caregivers, what concerns you about their wellbeing?

Both groups completed an open Mentimeter word cloud on what concerns them about the wellbeing of their parents and caregivers.

Their responses are grouped into the following themes:

Theme	Terms used
Burnout, rest and overwork	"burnt out" (the most common under-18 response), "not taking a break", "lots of effort no rest", "overload", "burnout from work", "not having time to rest", "not looking after themselves"
The young person's own impact on their parents	"overly worried about me", "me and work", "how what I do impacts them", "my grades", "my ATAR in the future", "worries about my future"
Health and healthcare access	"health", "health and stress", "physical health", "them seeking healthcare", "mental health taboo", "no culturally appropriate services"
What was missing: support, trust and connection	"lack of support" (the most common 18+ response), "lack of friendships", "lack of family support", "lack of trust", "not feeling helped", "share the load"
Culture, migration and belonging	"adapting to Australia", "getting used to a new area", "worry about family overseas", "homesickness", "multiple cultures", "multiple religion", "intergenerational trauma", "refugee trauma"
Racism and discrimination	"racism", "racism and discrimination", "racism at work"
Family and structural pressures	" <u>family</u> conflict or stress", "unequal parenting", "familial pressures", "patriarchy", "fearing judgement", "finance"

Open Mentimeter word cloud, both groups (under 18 n=9 of 11; 18+ n=7 of 9). Themes are specific to this cohort's responses. Indicative only.

Under-18 participants were most concerned about exhaustion and academic pressure. Burnout and its variants were the most common entries, and participants named their own grades, ATAR and future as a source of their parents' stress. Racism was entered three times, including racism at work.

Nine of the 18+ group's responses (n=25) described their parents' wellbeing in terms of what was missing: support, friendships, trust, rest and culturally appropriate services, alongside intergenerational and refugee trauma. Across both groups, participants identified pressures their parents had not necessarily named to them, and pointed to a need for care that supports the whole family, not only young people.

Question 3 — Parenting advice from Young and Wise participants, 2026

Participants' advice to parents and caregivers (Mentimetre open responses, both groups combined):

18+ Mentimetre responses

Terms used
"It's ok to ask for help."
"Seeking help is not a sign of weakness."
"You are doing so well. Don't give up."
"Burnout is real."
"Communication is essential."
"You're in Australia now. It's ok if things aren't like how they were at home."
"You don't have to be the superhero all the time."

Under 18 Mentimetre responses

Terms used
"Stop trying to be the perfect person — it makes your kids think they have to live up to it and never fail."
"Not to worry too much about me. Even if my grades drop, I will make it back up."
"I just want to be with you more, regardless of what we lose as a result."
"Being CALD, parents who've come overseas and built a life on one suitcase — they just need to know they are doing enough and that we are proud of them."

Survey findings reinforce the connection between material pressure, family wellbeing and young people's sense of safety. Respondents ranked mental and physical health as the top issue parents and caregivers should focus on, and identified more stress and tension at home as the strongest impact when money is tight. This aligns with CALD participants' accounts of family wellbeing as closely connected to young people's wellbeing, particularly where families are also navigating settlement stress, financial pressure, underemployment, racism or limited support.

Alcohol, Vaping and Other Drugs

Messages about alcohol, vaping and drugs differed markedly between home and school or media. Family and community messaging tended toward prohibition and shame; school and social media toward harm reduction or normalisation. This question was included specifically for this cohort on the advice of the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), who identified alcohol and other drug use as a gap in CALD-specific research, citing cultural taboo, family expectations and fear of stigma or consequences as reasons this topic is under-explored for this cohort. The prohibition-and-shame pattern found here partially reflects that gap. Further, dedicated research with CALD young people on alcohol and other drug use would help build on this early signal.

Broader Young and Wise 2026 Survey findings support the need for a wellbeing-oriented approach to harmful products. Survey respondents identified coping with stress or poor mental health and social pressure or fitting in as leading reasons young people use addictive or harmful products. This aligns with CALD participants’ accounts of young people navigating mixed messages from family, school, peers, community and media, and suggests that prevention should address stress, belonging and trusted information rather than relying only on fear or shame-based messaging.

Mentimetre open text (18+ group) on how messages compare across sources:

Family, culture and community	School, friends, and media
"Don't drink alcohol, your life will be ruined."	"Alcohol and drugs are a rite of passage. They're cool. You should try them."
"Don't do them (especially drugs)."	"Harm minimisation."
"Vapes and drugs viewed very negatively — not encouraged at all."	"Vaping viewed as bad but not as necessarily looked down upon."
"Much more taboo."	"Almost like: we know you're doing it, so do it safely."



"There's often like a lot of scare tactics with like community, like they'll give examples of, 'oh, you know, remember so and so's son, they're now in juvie', those sorts of things...Instead of trying to understand ...our young people..."
— Deidentified, CALD Roundtable 18+

Priority solutions from young people

In the final activity, participants completed a hypothetical budget-allocation exercise, distributing 100 points across eight possible investments to improve the wellbeing of CALD young people. Scores show the average proportion of points allocated to each option. As with other activities in this consultation, results are indicative rather than representative. The results for this cohort showed different top priorities, reflecting different life stages.

Treasurer! You have \$100 billion to spend on improving the wellbeing of CALD young people in Australia. How will you spend it?

Points	Priority (Under 18 group)	Points	Priority (18+ group)
22	Recognition of overseas skills, qualifications & experience in employment	15	Accessible English classes for linguistically diverse families and migrants
15	Changing discriminatory/racist cultures in schools and community services	15	Support workers from your community who understand your cultural/linguistic identity
14	Paid roles for CALD young people to co-design and lead services	15	Safe, stable, and affordable housing for migrants and international students
13	Culturally-safe mental health support in more languages	13	Changing discriminatory/racist cultures in schools and community services
11	Support workers from your community who understand your identity	11	Culturally-safe mental health support in more languages
10	Culturally-safe and accessible support for domestic, family and sexual violence	11	Recognition of overseas skills, qualifications & experience in employment
9	Safe, stable, and affordable housing for migrants and international students	11	Culturally-safe and accessible support for domestic, family and sexual violence
6	Accessible English classes for linguistically diverse families and migrants	11	Paid roles for CALD young people to co-design and lead the services and programs

The under-18 group placed employment recognition first, likely reflecting awareness of their parents' situation and concern about their own future. The 18+ group spread top priorities equally across housing, English access and community support workers. Both groups ranked culturally-safe mental health support highly, and paid CALD roles in co-design in the top four.

**One thing governments could do if cost were no object
(Mentimetre open text, both groups):**



"...more research into how integrated or multicultural communities experience and support wellbeing. In particular, how Western mental health approaches can work alongside culturally informed practices to create more balanced and effective services."

— Chris, CALD Roundtable 18+ Chat



"Recognition and stronger protection for CALD students against racism in schools."

— Participant, CALD Roundtable Under 18 [Mentimetre]



"Australia is multicultural and it is important to ensure that we are all treated with equity, giving every ethnic community a sum of money to use towards festivals so they can improve them and allow students to embrace their culture without being ashamed."

— Participant, CALD Roundtable Under 18 [Mentimetre]



"Support them with housing and jobs. Bare minimum."

— Participant, CALD Roundtable 18+ [Mentimetre]



"Please look out for those who fall through the cracks, especially young people who don't have access to Centrelink payments or social housing due to visa status or being asylum seekers."

— Participant, CALD Roundtable 18+ [Mentimetre]

The broader Young and Wise 2026 Survey findings support the CALD chapter's emphasis on material basics. Food and cost-of-living support for families was one of the highest survey investment priorities, and respondents ranked stress and tension at home as the strongest impact when money is tight. This reinforces CALD participants' accounts of housing, income, employment recognition, language access and family financial pressure as wellbeing issues, not only economic issues.

Cohort specific policy signals

Policies that specifically target CALD communities, multicultural inclusion, or have direct relevance to the barriers described by participants. The analysis is not a formal evaluation, but a lived-experience-informed signal of how policy settings may be experienced by this group.

Policy / Strategy	Relevant Goal	What Participants Said	Signal
Australia's Multicultural Framework (2023) 'A Multicultural Australia for All'	Strengthen multicultural belonging, reduce discrimination, ensure services are accessible for all Australians regardless of background.	Belonging-related school items rated below 3.0. Racism in schools described as systemic and unaddressed. Cultural belonging is performed at events but not protected day-to-day. Participants described schools celebrating diversity while crushing accountability.	Not yet reaching — gap between intent and implementation
National Anti-Racism Framework 'Racism. It Stops <u>With</u> Me' (Australian Human Rights Commission)	Reduce racism across Australian institutions, communities and online environments through awareness, education and accountability.	Racism described as common and largely unaddressed in schools, health services and community sport. Both groups allocated 13–15 Menti points to 'changing discriminatory/racist cultures'. Racism prevention education rated 2.4–2.6/5 in both groups.	Not yet reaching — awareness without enforcement
Multicultural Access and Equity Policy (Department of Home Affairs)	Ensure Australian Government services are accessible to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including through language access.	Mentimetre data: health services rated 2.0–2.5 on cultural respect and language access across both groups. Participants described health and community services that were effectively inaccessible due to language barriers and cultural mismatch.	Not yet reaching — language access gap persists
Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) (Department of Home Affairs)	Provide free English language tuition to eligible migrants and humanitarian entrants to support settlement and participation.	18+ group allocated 15 Mentimetre points to 'accessible English classes for linguistically diverse families and migrants' — joint first spending priority. Participants described parents unable to navigate services, school systems and employment without language support.	Not yet reaching — eligibility gaps and low awareness

Policy / Strategy	Relevant Goal	What Participants Said	Signal
Qualifications Recognition / Skills Assessment Frameworks (including VETASSESS, engineering and health professional pathways)	Enable skilled migrants to have overseas qualifications recognised for employment in Australia.	Under-18 group's top spending priority: recognition of overseas skills, qualifications and experience (22 Mentimetre points — highest score of all items). Families of participants described working significantly below their qualification level. This was also raised as a compounding driver of financial stress.	Not yet reaching — recognition gap, especially for non-English-speaking backgrounds
National Housing and Homelessness Agreement / Housing Australia Future Fund (2023)	Increase supply of social and affordable housing; support people at risk of homelessness, including those from CALD	18+ group ranked safe, stable, affordable housing joint first priority (15 Mentimetre points). Participants explicitly noted asylum seekers and visa holders as excluded from Centrelink and social housing eligibility — “those who fall through the cracks.”	Not yet reaching — eligibility gaps exclude the most vulnerable
Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024	Protect children and young people under 16 from potential harms on age-restricted social media platforms.	Under-18 Mentimetre: only 1.6/5 felt safer online as a result; 3.4/5 agreed it is harder to find communities. Ban is easily circumvented via fake dates of birth. CALD young people lose <u>peer</u> community, advocacy access and culturally relevant support. Schools continued posting on restricted platforms, excluding under-16 students.	Unintended effects — community and advocacy access removed without alternatives
National School Reform Agreement (2023–2028) / Australian Student Wellbeing Framework	Improve student outcomes and wellbeing through nationally consistent reform, including inclusion and anti-discrimination education.	Cultural inclusion in curriculum and racism prevention education rated lowest in both Mentimetre groups (2.4–2.6/5). ESL misclassification based on appearance described by multiple participants. Wellbeing staff described as culturally unequipped. Both groups ranked ‘more wellbeing staff’ as their top school intervention (7 votes, 18+ group).	Not yet reaching — implementation gap for CALD students

Policy / Strategy	Relevant Goal	What Participants Said	Signal
National Preventive Health Strategy 2021–2030	Prevent ill health and reduce health inequities through earlier, more equitable access to health services and health literacy.	Mental health help-seeking was described by multiple participants as being seen within their family or community as something people of a different cultural background do — not them. Health literacy campaigns have not reached CALD communities in ways that challenge stigma in culturally appropriate and language-accessible ways. Health services were rated below 2.5 out of 5 on cultural safety across all measures by the 18-and-over group.	Not yet reaching — CALD-specific cultural and language barriers unaddressed
National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement	Reduce the burden of mental illness and suicide and improve access to equitable mental health support across Australia.	GPs from the same cultural background as a patient were described in some cases as reinforcing family stigma rather than providing independent professional care. Participants described years of 'shopping around' to find a trustworthy GP. Language-accessible mental health services were described as absent or unknown. Both groups described mental health topics receiving some of the lowest helpfulness ratings in their school education.	Not yet reaching — cultural safety gap in service delivery

Policy / Strategy	Relevant Goal	What Participants Said	Signal
National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020)	Close the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians across health, education, employment and safety.	CALD participants — including those with intersecting First Nations heritage — described being used as tokens at school assemblies: singled out to give cultural demonstrations or Acknowledgements of Country without genuine inclusion throughout school life. This was described as uncomfortable and performative rather than empowering.	Unintended effects — tokenism affecting both First Nations and CALD students
headspace — National Youth Mental Health Foundation (service expansion)	Provide accessible, youth-friendly mental health services for young people in Australia.	Participants described headspace as primarily associated with First Nations cultural safety, and not consistently relevant or culturally safe for young people from other multicultural backgrounds. A multilingual, multi-service community hub — available to the whole CALD family, not just young people — was proposed as a more effective model.	Not yet reaching — cultural safety reach perception of limited to specific groups



Links to The Nest: top 3 issues for further development

The CALD roundtables identified a wide range of opportunities for further research, policy development and implementation attention. The three priorities below capture the strongest lived-experience signals from this cohort and show where further work could most improve wellbeing across multiple Nest domains.

1. **Culturally safe and trusted mental health and wellbeing support**
2. **Anti-racism accountability and culturally responsive schools**
3. **Family, settlement and material security as wellbeing foundations**

1. Culturally safe and trusted mental health and wellbeing support

CALD young people described mental health as central to wellbeing, but not consistently supported by services, schools or family systems. Participants described stigma, language barriers, limited trust, culturally mismatched support and uncertainty about whether services would understand their experiences. The 18+ group rated health service cultural safety below 2.5 out of 5 across measures, indicating a strong gap between service availability and services feeling safe, trusted and usable.

Further development should focus on how mental health and wellbeing support can be made genuinely accessible for CALD young people. This includes culturally safe services, language access, practitioners who understand cultural and migration contexts, confidentiality, everyday language for talking about mental health, and support that does not assume one model of family, culture or help-seeking. It should also recognise that having a practitioner from a similar cultural background does not automatically make care safe if stigma or assumptions are reproduced.

- **Relevant Nest domains:** Healthy; Valued, Loved and Safe; Positive Sense of Identity and Culture; Material Basics.
- **Key policy-development question:** How can governments strengthen youth mental health systems so CALD young people can access support that is culturally safe, linguistically accessible, confidential and trusted by young people and families?

2. Anti-racism accountability and culturally responsive schools

CALD young people described a gap between symbolic inclusion and practical follow-through. Schools may celebrate cultural diversity through events or displays, but participants described racism, stereotyping, Eurocentric curriculum, assumptions about language needs and inconsistent responses when harm occurs. Participants also described being placed in language-support classes based on appearance or perceived background rather than assessed need.

Further development should focus on how schools move from multicultural recognition to anti-racism accountability. This includes consistent responses to racism and discrimination, culturally responsive curriculum, teacher capability, representation in staff and wellbeing roles, visible safe spaces or cultural student groups, and support based on assessed need rather than assumptions about identity, language or migration background.

This priority also connects to wellbeing education. CALD participants described gaps in mental health, racism, discrimination, sexual health and alcohol/vaping/drug education, particularly where messages from school, family, peers, media and community conflicted. Young people wanted non-judgemental, culturally relevant information and safe discussion spaces.

- **Relevant Nest domains:** Learning; Valued, Loved and Safe; Positive Sense of Identity and Culture; Healthy.
- **Key policy-development question:** How can school systems ensure cultural diversity is supported through everyday practice, anti-racism accountability, culturally responsive curriculum and assessed support needs — not only symbolic recognition?



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