



Submission to the *Draft ACT Multicultural
Strategy 2009 – 2012*

March 2009

www.youthcoalition.net

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

Submission to the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*
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March 2009

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1. Introduction

Section 1 of this submission provides contextual information about Youth Coalition of the ACT (Youth Coalition), an ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, and multicultural young people in the ACT. It also outlines the process by which this submission was developed, describes the format of the submission and provides a summary of comments on the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 - 2012* (the draft Strategy).

1.1 Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 75 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of people aged between 12 and 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government Advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on youth issues as well as providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions for young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

1.2 Process for Developing and Format of this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the draft Strategy and multicultural youth policy development in the ACT. We would like to congratulate the ACT Government on its commitment to progressing multicultural affairs through the development of the draft Strategy.

This submission is one of many made over a ten year period by the Youth Coalition and is based on the following:

- The priority areas highlighted in the *Youth Coalition Strategic Plan 2007-10*;
- The policy positions outlined in the *Youth Coalition Policy Platform*;
- The views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Biennial Policy Forum;
- The results of the *Youth Coalition 2008 Budget Stakeholder Survey*;
- The issues raised at consultations on the 2009/10 ACT Government Budget;
- *The Youth Coalition of the ACT Submission to the ACT Budget 2009 – 2010*;
- A planning day and issues raised through the development of a Multicultural Youth Affairs Network in the ACT;
- Specific consultations conducted with the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network;
- A stakeholder survey on the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

This submission has been divided into 7 sections, which include the following:

1. Introduction (this section)
2. Summary of recommendations
3. Structure and Development of the draft Strategy
4. Current content of the draft Strategy

5. Further content for the draft Strategy
6. Where to from here?
7. References

This submission represents an opportunity for the Youth Coalition and stakeholders to identify and advise ACT Government of emerging issues, areas in need of additional resources and collaboratively develop social policy in the ACT.

1.3 ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network

An ACT Multicultural Youth Affairs Network (the Network) began in July 2008, which seeks to improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services (locally and nationally), strengthen connections between 'mainstream' and multicultural youth services and raise the profile of multicultural youth issues in the ACT.

Currently, 80 cross-sectoral individuals from government and non-government services are members of the Network. Although unfunded, the Network has made significant achievements including:

- Training with youth workers (August 2008);
- Planning Day (August 2008);
- Newsletter (September 2008 and December 2008);
- Network meeting, focusing in Sudanese young people (November 2008);
- Participation in the Youth Coalition's Budget Submission process (December 2008 – February 2009);
- Network consultation to discuss the draft Strategy (March 2009); and,
- A survey of stakeholders on the draft Strategy (March 2009).

For more information on the Network, see Section 5.6.

1.4 Multicultural Young People in the ACT

Cultural diversity is a proud and prominent feature of Canberra. It was recently estimated that 32 700 people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds live in Canberra.¹ Almost 14% of young people in the ACT were born overseas, and over 6,500 young people speak languages other than English at home.²

Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the proportion of people aged under 30 years arriving through Australia's Humanitarian Program,³ with young people accounting for 38.3% of the ACT's total humanitarian entrants between 2002 and 2007.⁴ These young people may have been exposed to extreme poverty, conflict and violence in their country of origin, and many will have spent time in transit in other countries or in refugee camps where life is unpredictable, physically difficult and sometimes violent.⁵

The impact of these experiences, including significant effects on psychological wellbeing, family relationships, and on adapting to a new environment, will continue for young people as they are settling in the ACT. These experiences are further complicated by the fact that they may also experience similar issues to other young people, such as homelessness; poor health; lack of education, employment and recreational opportunities; and conflict in family and peer relationships.⁶

Limited multicultural and settlement services are available in the ACT. Community consultations for the *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 - 2009* found that young

refugees and newly arrived young people have specific needs and are particularly affected by settlement, and identified the lack of programs to support young people.⁷

The ACT Government has stated that all migrants should be able to gain access to targeted essential services and programs; and committed to providing the full range of essential settlement services, such as housing, transport, education, work experience programs, counselling and orientation assistance for newly arrived migrants.⁸

The ACT Government's 2008 election commitments relating to multicultural young people included:

- Funding a campaign in the multicultural community to reduce community stigma associated with mental health issues experienced by young people;
- Funding a program to assist refugees in the community with living skills;
- Funding a campaign to increase awareness of consumer protection among multicultural youth to reduce exploitation and debt levels;
- Funding an orientation program for multicultural young people to learn about Australia's legal system with an emphasis on road use; and,
- Establishing a program to assist young multicultural women to understand their identity in the context of a cross-cultural environment.⁹

We commend the ACT Government for reflecting these election commitments in the draft Strategy. The incorporation of the recommendations in this submission will strengthen these commitments and the systems set up to support the diverse and unique needs of multicultural young people and their families in the ACT.

1.5 Summary of Comments on the draft Strategy

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to input into the draft Strategy. We commend the commitment by the ACT Government to developing a Strategy based upon community consultation and key stakeholder feedback.

There are several significant strengths of the draft Strategy, which include:

- Young people have been identified as a key theme;
- Consultations were conducted with the community to identify issues;
- The views expressed at the ACT Multicultural Summit in 2008 are reflected; and,
- The ACT Government responded to issues raised by the community through a statement of position.

These are important strengths of the document and the development of social policy in the ACT. In light of this, this submission has been based on how these strengths can be built upon to ensure that multicultural policy in the ACT is effective and meets the diverse and unique needs of multicultural young people and their families.

The Youth Coalition experienced several challenges in developing this submission, primarily due to the format of the draft Strategy. There are significant gaps in the document, which make it difficult to identify what actions that will be implemented over the coming four years. Our consultations have revealed that other key stakeholders have experienced similar challenges with the draft Strategy.

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for including young people as a key theme and ensuring the ACT Government's 2008 election commitments to multicultural young people are reflected in the draft Strategy.

In Section 4 of this submission, the Youth Coalition has responded to specific statements and commitments in the draft Strategy. A key issue raised in this section is the commitment by the ACT Government to provide one-off funding to a multicultural youth service to support multicultural young people at risk of social isolation. The issues that multicultural young people experience are ongoing and require longer-term support.

This submission also identifies existing gaps in the draft Strategy, and emerging issues, that should be reflected in the Strategy. A key recommendation is that the ACT Government provides recurrently funding to the Multicultural Youth Services, to provide essential services for young people in the ACT. Currently, this service receives short-term, project based ACT Government funding, and its drop-in service will close within 3 months if funding is not secured.

This submission reflects significant cross-sectoral consultation and has identified many opportunities upon which the draft Strategy can be further strengthened. The Youth Coalition calls upon the ACT Government to extend the process of the development of the draft Strategy throughout 2009, and to work with key stakeholders to collaboratively develop strong evidence-based policy in the ACT.

2. Summary of Recommendations

The Youth Coalition makes the following recommendations:

Section 3: Structure and Development of the draft Strategy

Recommendation 1

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include a theme on human rights.

Recommendation 2

That the current *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009* be reconciled with the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

Recommendation 3

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include a policy context.

Recommendation 4

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* contain an implementation plan that outlines the delegation of responsibilities and priorities, specifies strategies for implementation, outlines a timeframe for the progression of actions, and identifies reporting and evaluation mechanisms against each action.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government create synergies between key policy documents including:

- *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*;
- *Draft ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2012*;
- *Draft ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013*;
- *ACT Caring for Carers Plan* (when developed);
- *ACT Young People's Plan* (when developed); and,
- *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* (when developed).

Recommendation 6

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* clearly states which stakeholders it applies to.

Recommendation 7

That all actions within the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* that apply to young people are developed using youth participation models, and in collaboration with key stakeholders, including young people and youth services.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government publicly release the report from the Multicultural Youth Summit 2007 and incorporate its findings into *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

Recommendation 9

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* contain a balance of consultation with other forms of evidence.

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Government utilise evidence based policy development in the further development of the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

Recommendation 11

As part of a whole-of-government initiative, the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include a commitment to developing an updated social and demographic profile of young people in the ACT that includes a multicultural focus.

Recommendation 12

That the ACT Government adopt three key forms of monitoring and reporting in the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*:

- Annual Ministerial Statement;
- All ACT Government agencies to report on their performance in their Annual Reports; and
- Annual implementation plan progress reports.

Section 4: Current Content of the draft Strategy**Recommendation 13**

That the issues in *Table 1: Language and Definitions* of this submission be resolved and incorporated into the revised *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

Recommendation 14

That the issues in *Table 2: Language Policy Section* of this submission be resolved and incorporated into the revised *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

Recommendation 15

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states what essential services are provided to multicultural young people through mainstream and multicultural services.

Recommendation 16

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* urgently provide recurrent core funding to Multicultural Youth Services, to prevent the closure of its essential drop-in service on 1 July 2009.

Recommendation 17

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop synergies with the *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2012* to form meaningful actions in relation to multicultural young people and alcohol and other drugs (see also Recommendation 5).

Recommendation 18

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop synergies with the *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013* to form meaningful actions in relation to multicultural young people and mental health (see also Recommendation 5).

Recommendation 19

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of the mental health campaign, specify how much funding will be provided, and ensure the campaign is implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders.

Recommendation 20

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of the initiative focusing on the Australian legal system, specify how much funding will be provided, and ensure the initiative builds upon the work of key stakeholders in the multicultural, youth and community legal sectors.

Recommendation 21

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of the consumer protection campaign, specify how much funding will be provided, and ensure the campaign is implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders.

Recommendation 22

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include an action to waive the six-month waiting period applied to newly-arrived and refugee housing applicants.

Recommendation 23

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states which ACT Government agency is responsible for funding a living skills program, specify how much funding will be provided, and how it will include the specific needs of young people.

Recommendation 24

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states which ACT Government agency is responsible for increasing literacy and numeracy education programs for new arrivals, and include information on how and when this strategy will be implemented.

Recommendation 25

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states which ACT Government agency is responsible for establishing a program to assist young women, and include information on how and when this strategy will be implemented.

Recommendation 26

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* state specific actions each ACT Government agency will implement to progress access and equity strategies over the next four years.

Section 5: Further Content for the draft Strategy**Recommendation 27**

That the ACT Government allocate targeted resources to support young Burmese refugees and their families in the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 - 2012*.

Recommendation 28

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* includes actions and targeted resources for young people and families to reduce family conflict and support transition processes.

Recommendation 29

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop synergies with the next *ACT Caring for Carers Plan* to form meaningful actions in relation to multicultural young carers (see also Recommendation 5).

Recommendation 30

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop specific strategies to address care and protection issues for multicultural young people and their families.

Recommendation 31

That the ACT Government commit to resourcing a *Multicultural Youth Network* in the ACT in the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 - 2012*.

Section 6: Where to from here?**Recommendation 32**

That the ACT Government commit to continuing the consultation process with stakeholders throughout 2009 to redraft the current version of the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 2012*.

3. Structure and Development of the draft Strategy

Section 3 of this submission includes comments and recommendations on the structure and development of the *ACT Draft Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* (the draft Strategy).

3.1 Human Rights

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the inclusion of human rights within all ACT Government policy. We acknowledge the inclusion of human rights within the principles of the draft Strategy. However we are concerned that human rights do not constitute a theme in their own right – as was the case for the *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009*. We believe that human rights is a crucial theme for the draft Strategy, particularly with a review of the *Human Rights Act* planned in 2009.

Recommendation 1

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include a theme on human rights.

3.2 Building on the current ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009

The *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009* (the current Strategy) provides the framework by which each ACT Government agency can be guided in its response to issues identified by the multicultural community.¹⁰ The stated reporting mechanisms are: “The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services will be the lead agency and all ACT Government agencies will report on their performance against the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009 in their Annual Reports”.¹¹

It is clear that ACT Government agencies’ annual reports report against their actions on the themes in the current Strategy. This is a significant achievement and has sought to ensure that multicultural affairs become embedded in their organisational practice.

However, this action and information has not been collated or presented to inform the context and development of the draft Strategy. It is also not clear to what extent, or how satisfactorily the commitments in the current Strategy have been achieved. Because of this, it is not clear how the draft Strategy will build upon these achievements and identify what work is still to be completed. It is crucial that this information is incorporated into the draft Strategy in order to give it currency and accountability.

Recommendation 2

That the current *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009* be reconciled with the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

3.3 An ACT Government Response to a Community Consultation or a Whole-of-Government Strategy?

Across the four themes, the draft Strategy utilises the format of introducing the theme, providing an overview of issues raised by the community and closes with the ACT Government position. It therefore reads like a Government response to a review or, as in this case, community consultation.

As the document stands it can be used as an important tool to strengthen communication between the ACT Government and the Canberra community.

However, the Youth Coalition has concerns that it does not, in its current form, constitute a whole-of-government strategy.

Youth Coalition consultations indicate that stakeholders do not believe the draft Strategy effectively achieves the following common features of strategic policy documents:

- Explains aims and objectives;
- Explains the legislative and regulatory context;
- Provides definitions of key terms;
- Explains conflicts and limitations;
- Explains the policy context;
- Provides monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms;
- Identifies key stakeholders;
- Identifies policy areas to be progressed;
- Provides an overview of the current knowledge (review of the literature and / or the current ACT system);
- Provides demographic information;
- Provides information about key issues;
- Explains the roles of key stakeholders;
- Identifies priorities;
- Outlines responsibility for the progression of actions;
- Specifies strategies for implementation; and,
- Contains recommendations for action.

The inclusion of some, or all of the above areas, would further develop the draft Strategy to be an effective and meaningful policy document for multicultural affairs in the ACT for the next four years.

At the very least, the draft Strategy should also contain an implementation plan that outlines the responsibilities for the progression of actions, includes a timetable and identifies reporting and evaluation mechanisms. It is also essential that the strategies are developed and implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders, including young people and youth services.

Recommendation 3

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include a policy context.

Recommendation 4

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* contain an implementation plan that outlines the delegation of responsibilities and priorities, specifies strategies for implementation, outlines a timeframe for the progression of actions, and identifies reporting and evaluation mechanisms against each action.

3.4 Developing Effective Whole-of-Government Policy in the ACT

The Youth Coalition understands there is currently no template or procedure that guides social policy development in the ACT Government,¹² but that policy needs to be consistent with The Canberra Plan and Human Rights legislation.

This presents significant challenges for policy makers, program managers, stakeholders and the community, as it becomes extremely difficult to identify who is responsible for actions, their efficacy and timelines. In relation to the draft Strategy, this makes it difficult to ascertain which ACT Government agency is responsible for progressing key actions in multicultural affairs.

The ACT Government is currently developing key policy documents in the areas of alcohol and other drugs, mental health and multicultural affairs. In each of their draft forms, none of these policy documents cross-reference to each other. Furthermore the *ACT Young People's Plan 2004 – 2008* and the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan 2004 – 2008* have expired. These are key policy documents that would underpin a whole-of-government strategy such as this.

The Youth Coalition therefore calls on the ACT Government to develop strategies to take advantage of this unique and important opportunity presented in this term of government to create synergies across key policy areas, particularly in youth affairs.

Recommendation 5

That the ACT Government create synergies between key policy documents including:

- *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*;
- *Draft ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2012*;
- *Draft ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013*;
- *ACT Caring for Carers Plan* (when developed);
- *ACT Young People's Plan* (when developed); and,
- *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* (when developed).

3.5 Who does the draft Strategy apply to?

The title of the draft Strategy, *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*, implies that it is a strategy that applies to the entire ACT community. However, the content of the draft Strategy refers to a 'whole-of-government' strategy'.¹³ Youth Coalition consultations reveal that stakeholders believe the draft Strategy should apply to the whole of the ACT community, including the private sector.

It would therefore be useful, and improve readability, if the target group of the draft Strategy is clearly stated.

Recommendation 6

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* clearly states which stakeholders it applies to.

3.6 Youth Participation¹⁴

Participation for young people is about getting them involved so they can have their say in a way that is comfortable and appropriate for them. It involves actively listening to what the young people have to say and incorporating their ideas in decision-making.

NSW Commission for Children and Young People
www.kids.nsw.gov.au

The Youth Coalition is pleased that young people have been identified as a key theme in the draft Strategy, and that young people were invited to participate in the Multicultural Summit upon which the draft Strategy is based. However, it is important to ensure that youth participation forms an integral part of the further development, and subsequent implementation of the draft Strategy.

Participation gives young people opportunities to voice their opinions and make decisions about their own lives. Young people's participation in decisions that affect them and the life of their community is valuable and has a range of positive outcomes for young people and those who engage with them.

Youth participation requires a commitment from the ACT Government, and other stakeholders, to adequately resource the process, and to build a culture where young people are able to contribute in valuable and meaningful ways. Without adequate resources and commitment to the implementation of youth participation policies and practices, services are at risk of engaging young people in tokenistic ways.

The ACT Government has reflected its commitment to youth participation through the *ACT Young People's Plan 2004 – 2008*. The Youth Coalition therefore calls upon the ACT Government to ensure that youth participation models, policies and practices are identified and utilised in the further development of the draft Strategy.

Recommendation 7

That all actions within the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* that apply to young people are developed using youth participation models, and in collaboration with key stakeholders, including young people and youth services.

3.7 Youth Multicultural Summit 2007

As discussed above, youth participation should be meaningful and this can only occur when young people are adequately informed, supported in their involvement, valued, and they believe the work they are doing will have an outcome.

In 2007, the ACT Government held a successful consultation with young people on the development of multicultural youth affairs in the ACT – the Multicultural Youth Summit 2007. This consultation received positive feedback by participants and youth service providers; and was a significant and important method of engagement between young people, multicultural youth leaders and the ACT Government.

We understand that at the Summit the ACT Government committed to issuing a report about the Summit. We also understand this report has not yet been released. The release of this report can function in two key ways, firstly to provide feedback to young people about the process and outcomes of their participation; and secondly, to help shape the draft Strategy. The Youth Coalition therefore calls on the ACT Government to release the report and incorporate its findings into the draft Strategy.

Recommendation 8

That the ACT Government publicly release the report from the Multicultural Youth Summit 2007 and incorporate its findings into *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

3.8 Balance consultation with other forms of evidence

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for undertaking consultations to inform the development of the draft Strategy. Initiatives such as the ACT Multicultural Summit in 2008 (the Summit) are crucial in order to facilitate the diverse views of the Canberra community on multicultural affairs.

The Youth Coalition understands that the draft Strategy primarily incorporates the views expressed at the Summit in 2008. Through our consultations, key stakeholders have stated that the draft Strategy incorporates most of the findings of the day, which is to again be commended. However, the Youth Coalition is concerned that not all key stakeholders were present at the Summit. As the Summit was held on a weekend, the views expressed may not be sufficient enough on which to base a whole-of-government strategy.

Furthermore, the Youth Coalition is concerned that these views are not triangulated with other sources of evidence (see section 3.9 and 3.10 for further discussion of this issue).

Recommendation 9

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* contain a balance of consultation with other forms of evidence.

3.9 Utilising Evidence Based Policy Development

It is crucial that the ACT Government is committed to 'evidence based' policy development. Governments are expected to develop policies, programs and projects based on clear evidence that links accurate information and rigorous analysis to proposed actions. While consultation, values and opinions are important, the demands for greater public accountability for resources, new and competing sources of research and knowledge both within and outside government, and an increasingly educated society, makes the need for evidence based policy and program development essential and urgent.

The Youth Coalition has serious concerns that an evidence base does not underpin the draft Strategy. For example, the document does not contain a literature review, demographic data or population projections. Although the document reflects community consultation this is not sufficient upon which to base four years of ACT multicultural policy.

Recommendation 10

That the ACT Government utilise evidence based policy development in the further development of the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

3.10 Developing the Evidence Base for Policy Development in the ACT: The Social and Demographic Profile of Young People in the ACT

It can be challenging to develop evidence-based policy when there are clear gaps in the information. This is why the Youth Coalition has been calling for the development of an updated social and demographic profile of young people to be a priority action for the newly appointed Demographer in the ACT, as announced in the 2008/2009 ACT Budget. The previous profile, *Youth in the ACT: A social and demographic profile* was released in 2002, primarily using now out of date data from 1996.

This information would greatly help the ACT Government in its development of key policy documents, such as the draft Strategy, over the next few years and support agencies to develop evidence based policy and programs.

Relevant and updated demographic analyses and population forecasting are crucial to inform the ACT Government and youth services about the changing nature of Canberra's young people, and help agencies efficiently plan and deliver infrastructure and services to young people and their families.

Therefore, the Youth Coalition calls for a new profile to be developed updating the statistics used in this document with, for example, the 2006 Census Data to ensure that the ACT Government and community sector is able to use the best possible data when making decisions about policy and service provision to young people in the ACT.

Recommendation 11

As part of a whole-of-government initiative, the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include a commitment to developing an updated social and demographic profile of young people in the ACT that includes a multicultural focus.

3.11 Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms

Monitoring and reporting mechanisms are crucial to the successful implementation and ownership of any policy documents. The Youth Coalition proposes three key reporting mechanisms for the draft Strategy. Firstly, we support the draft Strategy's reporting proposal that:

“The Minister for Multicultural Affairs, John Hargreaves MLA, proposes ACT Government agencies will be able to report on specific actions relating to the key themes of the *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009-2012*. It is suggested that this reporting should occur through an annual Ministerial Statement coordinated by the ACT Office of Multicultural Affairs, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.”¹⁵

Secondly, we recommend the reporting mechanism within the current Strategy remain, whereby:

“The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services will be the lead agency and all ACT Government agencies will report on their performance against the ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006-2009 in their Annual Reports.”¹⁶

Thirdly, we strongly urge the ACT Government to develop an annual action plan to accompany the draft Strategy. Currently the actions are unclear, able to be broadly interpreted by each ACT Government agency and responsibility and timelines are not specifically delegated.

Recommendation 12

That the ACT Government adopt three key forms of monitoring and reporting in the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*:

- Annual Ministerial Statement;
- All ACT Government agencies to report on their performance in their Annual Reports; and
- Annual implementation plan progress reports.

4. Current Content of the draft Strategy

Section 4 of this submission contains comments and recommendations on the current content of the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* (the draft Strategy).

4.1 Language and Definitions

The following table outlines specific language and definition issues that were identified in the draft Strategy. The table below identifies issues and provides related comments.

Table 1. Language and Definitions

Language in the draft Strategy	Comments
Culturally and Linguistically Diverse or Multicultural (pg 15 – 19)	It is crucial that the draft Strategy provide a definition, and leadership, of these key terms and subsequently uses them consistently throughout the document. We understand the ACT Government committed to defining these terms prior to the current Strategy. ¹⁷
‘The multicultural youth group’ or ‘multicultural youths’ (pg 15)	Multicultural young people, like all young people, are not a homogenous group. The term ‘youths’ carries negative connotations. There also layers of experiences multicultural young people have, such as: the ‘general’ experiences associated with being a young person; being a migrant young person; and being a refugee who has experienced trauma / war. There are also young people who have been born overseas, and those born in Australia with multicultural parents.
Definition of a young person / young people (pg 15)	The ACT Government defines young people as people aged between 12 – 25 years. We assume this footnote was included due to contextualise the data presented. However it is important to ensure there is consistency across ACT Government policy regarding this.
‘The community consultation called for improved public awareness about the <i>special</i> needs of young people’ (pg 15, para 9)	Recommended change: <i>special</i> to <i>specific</i> .
‘The community encouraged the ACT Government to provide more assistance for any projects and programs that assist young women <i>suffering</i> cross-cultural difficulties’ (pg 16, para 2)	Recommended change: <i>suffering</i> to <i>experiencing</i> .

<p>‘... it was identified that the multicultural youth group is facing mental health issues associated with community stigma, alcohol and drugs... and lack of mental health officers from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds.’ (pg 15, para 4)</p>	<p>Recommended change: <i>alcohol and drugs</i> to <i>alcohol and other drugs</i>. Recommended change: <i>mental health officers</i> to <i>mental health professionals and services</i>.</p>
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Recommendation 13

That the issues in *Table 1: Language and Definitions* of this submission be resolved and incorporated into the revised *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

4.2 Response to the ACT Government’s positions

Section 4.2 discusses content in Theme 1: Language Policy; Theme 3: Young People; and Theme 4: Access and Equity in the draft Strategy.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Language Policy

The Youth Coalition is pleased that the draft Strategy recognises the ACT education system is a key priority in progressing multicultural youth affairs in the ACT. However we are concerned that this section does not articulate the ACT Government’s language policy. The following table outlines specific issues that were identified with the Language Policy section of the draft Strategy.

Table 2. Language Policy Section

Objective at issue	Comments
Name of the theme: Language Policy (pg 9)	This section of the draft Strategy clearly does not articulate the ACT Government’s language policy. Generally it makes a commitment to supporting diverse language programs in public schools. We recommend that this theme be re-named to more clearly reflect the content.
Language and cultural education commitments (pg 10, para 11 – pg11 para 4)	We support initiatives to foster language education in schools and community settings. However it is not clear which ACT Government agencies has responsibility for each commitment nor when they will be completed. We strongly urge the ACT Government to include an implementation plan as part of the draft Strategy.
Access to English language training “The ACT Government also considers it of utmost significance that Canberrans who lack English language skills have access to English language training in the	It is not clear what the ACT Government has committed to in regards to supporting Canberrans to access English language training. This commitment reads as primarily aspirational. It would therefore be useful if specific actions were developed which were linked to target groups and attached to specific ACT Government agencies to progress. This information could then be reflected in the draft Strategy’s implementation plan. There is currently a need to map existing English language

<p>ACT, as appropriate, including in the workplace.” (pg 11, para 5)</p>	<p>training, particularly for young people, across schools and community services. This mapping will identify geographical and demographic gaps, seek to build on current initiatives and create greater sustainability.</p> <p>Young people experience significant challenges in accessing appropriate English language training. For example, currently there are some small programs to support young people in years 11 and 12 within the ACT Government school system. However many young people have had significant breaks in their education (up to 10 years) and do not necessary enter directly into years 11 and 12. Young people need for appropriate English as a Second Language training in late primary and early secondary school.</p>
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Recommendation 14

That the issues in *Table 2: Language Policy Section* of this submission be resolved and incorporated into the revised *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012*.

4.2.2 Theme 3: Young People

This section outlines the key issues in the Young People section of the draft Strategy identified by stakeholders as requiring further strategies or developments.

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for including young people as a key theme in the draft Strategy; and including the 2008 ACT Government election commitments relating to multicultural young people.¹⁸

Stakeholders had concerns that not all the issues raised by the community were addressed in the ACT Government’s position.

- a. **“It [ACT Government] will continue to provide a range of essential multicultural youth services through multicultural service providers and other mainstream organisations.” (pg 16, para 4)**

It is not clear, in the draft Strategy, which mainstream and specialised services the ACT Government will continue to provide. It is also not clear which multicultural young people are accessing these services, how effective they are, and how they are adapting to changing needs and demographics.

The Youth Coalition therefore calls on the ACT Government to be explicit in the draft Strategy in regards to what range of essential services the ACT Government provides to multicultural young people.

Mainstreaming services aims to strengthen multiculturalism by bringing welfare, educational, youth, health, government and other services from the margins into the central concerns of core social services. Theoretically, the policy of mainstreaming can strengthen multicultural services and enable them to better meet the high demand currently placed upon them. The fundamental factor, however, is that multicultural young people often experience challenges beyond that of simply being a young person; and specialised multicultural services, such as Multicultural Youth Services, need to be adequately resourced to support them.

The Youth Coalition has concerns about the capacity of mainstream organisations to effectively meet the diverse needs of multicultural young people, particularly those who are newly arrived. It cannot be assumed that services have the capacity, resources or skills to provide the specific support required. This is why specialist services, such as Multicultural Youth Services, are so crucial. Their expertise supports and complements mainstream organisations to meet the specific needs of multicultural young people.

If there is an expectation that mainstream services will further develop their capacity to work with multicultural young people then resources should be allocated through the draft Strategy to build this capacity.

We understand that many ACT Government funding agreements require services to report under the area of “access and equity”. We strongly support both government and non-government services to continually improve their practice to support multicultural young people and their families. However we understand that the scope of what can be captured under the banner of access and equity is very broad.

The Youth Coalition recently conducted a survey with mainstream services in the ACT regarding the multicultural support they provide and found, although positive in many areas, none had the specialist expertise and knowledge required to work without the support of specialist multicultural services, particularly in regards to supporting people who are newly arrived. Through our consultations mainstream services were adamant that specialist, appropriately funded multicultural youth services are required as part of the service system.

It appears contradictory that the draft Strategy commits the ACT Government to providing a range of essential services for multicultural young people when in 95 days Multicultural Youth Services will need to close its drop-in service due to lack of recurrent funding from the ACT Government (see the next section for more information).

Recommendation 15

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states what essential services are provided to multicultural young people through mainstream and multicultural services.

b. Provision of one – off funding to a multicultural youth service to assist multicultural young people at risk of social isolation (pg 16, para 8)

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the ACT Government’s commitment to providing additional funding for multicultural youth service provision.

However, we have concerns that the commitment to funding is one – off. While one – off funding can support innovation, through pilot programs for example, it is not an appropriate way to fund essential services.

Community services, such as Multicultural Youth Services, have the unique capacity to be responsive to specific needs of multicultural young people when their financial relationship with the ACT Government is supported. The United Kingdom Government has identified that one of the four key areas for improving financial relationships with the third sector is stability in the funding relationship - in particular moving to longer term funding arrangements.¹⁹

The Youth Coalition has serious concerns that the ACT Government refuses to provide recurrent funding to Multicultural Youth Services. The current funding Multicultural Youth Services receives from the Community Inclusion Board ceases on 30 June and as of 1 July 2009 the service will have to close its drop-in service due to lack of funding. This closure will directly impact on:

- The 880 (or 40 per day) multicultural young people who access the service; and,
- The 2000 client contacts (number of times a youth worker or Multicultural Youth Services' resources were accessed) per month.²⁰

This is not a new issue. The ACT Government has been made aware of this issue in the past five Youth Coalition Budget Submissions.

It is almost impossible to reconcile the ACT Government's commitment to young people as being one of four key themes in the draft Strategy over the next four years and then allow the closure of this essential and specialist service.

We therefore call on the ACT Government to urgently fund Multicultural Youth Services to keep its doors open for multicultural young people in the ACT (see section 5.1 for further discussion of this issue).

Recommendation 16

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include, as a matter of urgency, a commitment to the recurrent core funding to Multicultural Youth Services, to prevent the closure of its essential drop-in service on 1 July 2009.

c. Alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues raised by the community (pg 15, para 4), but not reflected in the ACT Government's position.

Alcohol and other drugs (AOD) issues are significant for all members of the ACT community. Both the *National Drug Strategy Household Survey* data set and the *ACT Component of the Australian Secondary Student Alcohol and Drug Survey* indicate that these issues are significant for young people.

Evidence to date suggests that AOD use is generally lower in multicultural communities, when compared with the general population. However, although the reasons for AOD use are often similar for most young people, there may be specific factors, such as migration and integration, which increase the risk of initiation into AOD use by multicultural young people. Evidence based strategies have been identified including parent education, addressing barriers to accessing services and providing recreation activities for young people.²¹

There is currently only one reference to multicultural issues in the *Draft Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Strategy 2009 - 2012*. Further discussions are required with service providers and community members to develop policy synergies and for meaningful commitments to be reflected in the draft Strategy.

Recommendation 17

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop synergies with the *ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2012* to form meaningful actions in relation to multicultural young people and alcohol and other drugs (see also Recommendation 5).

d. Fund a campaign to reduce stigma associated with mental health issues experienced by young people (pg 16, para 5)

The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government's commitment to providing funding for an initiative focused on multicultural young people and mental health.

It is important to acknowledge that mental health and multicultural young people is considerably more complicated than reducing stigma. The *Draft ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013* identifies that appropriate services need to be developed for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds²². Research also indicates that a sizeable number of young people and migrants (including their families and carers) do not seek help for their mental health issues²³.

It is imperative that this initiative is developed in partnership with services and young people to ensure the messages developed are appropriate and reach the targeted young people.

The underlying assumption of a mental health campaign is that mental health services are appropriate and accessible to multicultural young people. This is not the case, as it is well known that the ACT needs specific and targeted services for multicultural, or transcultural, mental health care.

Transcultural mental health extends the definition of mental health to look at the interactions of individuals and groups within a culturally diverse environment, to identify specific risk and protective factors for those individuals and groups who may be marginalised within the dominant culture, and to address societal and structural issues within the environment in order to promote their mental health and wellbeing²⁴.

The ACT Transcultural Mental Health Network is an important initiative with few resources and does not have a youth specific focus. This is another opportunity for policy synergies to be fostered across mental health and multicultural affairs.

Recommendation 18

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop synergies with the *ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013* to form meaningful actions in relation to multicultural young people and mental health (see also Recommendation 5).

Recommendation 19

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of the mental health campaign, specify how much funding will be provided, and ensure the campaign is implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders.

e. The ACT Government will fund an orientation program to assist multicultural youth to understand Australia's legal system. There will be an emphasis on road use in the program. (pg 17, para 1)

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the ACT Government commitment of additional funding for multicultural young people in the ACT.

Young people experience substantial barriers to obtaining legal assistance. Many young people do not have the knowledge, resources, confidence or skills to access advice in the same way as some other members of the community.

Many young people do not categorise their problems as legal issues, as many see "the law" as being solely about the police and crime. In addition there are only a handful of specialist children's and youth lawyers in Australia, particularly for non-criminal matters, which remains a largely neglected area of legal work.

The law can be very complex and confusing for young people and their families, especially those who are newly arrived. Multicultural young people often have the most limited understanding of their legal rights and the Australian legal system.

Once they have come into contact with the justice system, multicultural young people and their families may not understand their progress through the legal system nor the outcome. For example, young people driving without a licence, either due to a lack of awareness about the law or because of barriers to attaining a licence, puts young people at risk of early contact with the legal system.

It is important this funding and program build on the work that has already been done in the area of young people, the legal system and multicultural issues; and is developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including young people. Some key stakeholders would include:

- Multicultural Youth Services (www.mys.org.au)
- The Youth Law Centre ACT (www.youthlawact.org.au)
- Legal Aid Commission ACT (www.legalaid.canberra.net.au)
- Centre for Multicultural Youth (www.cmy.org.au)
- The National Children's and Youth Law Centre (www.ncylc.org.au)
- Youth Coalition of the ACT (www.youthcoalition.net)

The draft Strategy should state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of this initiative, and allocate a timeline.

Recommendation 20

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of the initiative focusing on the Australian legal system, specify how much funding will be provided, and ensure the initiative builds upon the work of key stakeholders in the multicultural, youth and community legal sectors.

f. The ACT Government will fund a campaign to increase awareness of consumer protection among multicultural youth to reduce exploitation and debt levels. (pg 16, para 9)

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the ACT Government's commitment of additional funding for multicultural young people in the ACT.

Young people are constantly called on to make consumer decisions and warrant targeted information campaigns as it is estimated young Australians aged between 10 and 17 have more than \$10 billion to spend each year- twice as much as 15 years ago.²⁵

It is imperative that the initiative rolled out is targeted, evidence based, developed using youth participation models, and engages key stakeholders. Please see an preliminary list of key stakeholders in 'section e'.

The draft Strategy should state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of this initiative, and allocate a timeline.

Recommendation 21

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly state which ACT Government agency will take carriage of the consumer protection campaign, specify how much funding will be provided, and ensure the campaign is implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders.

g. Enhance the ‘Refugee Transitional Housing Program’ (pg 16, para 6)

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the ACT Government’s commitment to expand the ‘Refugee Transitional Housing Program’. It is an important initiative to be reflected in the draft Strategy. However it is not a youth specific program and currently only houses families.

Newly arrived young people are six to ten times more likely to become homeless than other young people, and are particularly at risk of homelessness.²⁶

In the ACT, newly arrived young people and refugees are not permitted to access public housing for six months after arrival. Young people who may have been able to support their own tenancies often become homeless due to lack of access. This can lead to more complex problems, such as restricted access to social networks, poverty, economic isolation and cyclical chronic homelessness.²⁷

The current *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009* reaffirms the Government’s obligation to provide essential service to those seeking refuge in the ACT.²⁸ Better provision of flexible options for these young people will alleviate housing stress and ease the other pressures on refugee families integrating into the Canberra community.

By building flexibility into the current public housing system and reviewing social housing options, the ACT would be moving closer in line with other Australian states and territories such as NSW, who have made tangible commitments and implemented strategies to enable newly arrived tenants to access a range of housing options.

Recommendation 22

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include an action to waive the six-month waiting period applied to newly-arrived and refugee housing applicants.

h. The ACT Government will also fund a program to assist refugees in our community – including young people – with living skills (pg 16, para 7)

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the ACT Government’s commitment to fund a living skills program to assist refugees. However it is important that the youth specific aspects of this program are developed for the distinct needs of young people. As,

Young people are a distinct, and often discrete, population group aged between 12 – 25 years. Young people frequently experience systematic and systemic disadvantage, discrimination and unequal access to resources. Young people are not homogenous however their needs and interests are specific enough to justify interventions by people who are both knowledgeable about and skilled in working with young people.²⁹

The Youth Coalition recently commissioned a report, *Homeless Young People and Living Skills*, which found that living skills need to be both embedded into existing

youth services and be able to be flexible so as to address the specific needs of the individual young person³⁰.

However, the Youth Coalition has concerns about the capacity of mainstream organisations to effectively meet the diverse needs of multicultural young people, particularly those who are newly arrived. It cannot be assumed that services have the capacity, resources or skills to provide the specific support required. This is why specialist services, such as Multicultural Youth Services, are so crucial. Their expertise supports and complements mainstream organisations to meet the specific needs of multicultural young people.

It would therefore be helpful if the draft Strategy stated which ACT Government agency is responsible for funding this program and how it includes the specific needs of young people.

Recommendation 23

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states which ACT Government agency is responsible for funding a living skills program, specify how much funding will be provided, and how it will include the specific needs of young people.

- i. **The ACT Government supports ways to promote better understanding of special needs of young people, and is committed to increasing literacy and numeracy education programs for new arrivals. (pg 17, para 2).**

The Youth Coalition is pleased that the ACT Government “supports ways to promote better understanding of special needs of young people, and is committed to increasing literacy and numeracy education programs for new arrivals”.

However we encourage the draft Strategy to articulate which ACT Government agency will be responsible for implementing this commitment, and include information on how and when this strategy will be implemented.

Recommendation 24

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states which ACT Government agency is responsible for increasing literacy and numeracy education programs for new arrivals, and include information on how and when this strategy will be implemented.

- j. **Establishing a program to assist young women to understand their identity in the context of a cross-cultural environment (pg 17, para 3)**

The Youth Coalition strongly supports targeting resources to different groups of young people. This ensures that the initiative meets the specific needs of the young people in question. Our consultations support some gender specific programs for young people. There are some very good examples of how this has worked effectively across youth services.

It would be helpful if the draft Strategy stated which ACT Government agency is responsible for administering this program, and include information on how and when this program will be developed and implemented.

Recommendation 25

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* explicitly states which ACT Government agency is responsible for establishing a program to assist young women, and include information on how and when this strategy will be implemented.

4.2.3 Theme 4: Access and Equity

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the ACT Government's commitment to access and equity as a key theme in the draft Strategy. However the statements made in the ACT Government position generally articulate what is currently happening – not what we would like to see happen or to have changed in four years.

For example, with further consultation, each ACT Government agency could make specific commitments as to how they will progress access and equity strategies over the next four years.

Recommendation 26

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* state specific actions each ACT Government agency will implement to progress access and equity strategies over the next four years.

5. Further Content for the draft Strategy

Section 5 of this submission contains comments and recommendations regarding additional information the *ACT Draft Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* (the draft Strategy) should seek to address.

5.1 Multicultural Youth Services

Multicultural Youth Services (MYS) is the only youth specific service in the ACT for refugee, newly arrived and multicultural young people. The service is a specialised organisation with a high degree of organisational knowledge and skill in working with multicultural young people. MYS has been repeatedly recognised for their practice and importance, winning an *ACT Early Intervention Award* (2006), an *ACTCOSS Diversity Award* (2008) and a *Yogie Award for Excellence in Organisational Practice* (2008).

Multicultural young people and their families, as well as mainstream and multicultural services, rely on being able to access, work with and refer to MYS. MYS currently has three youth workers. At present, each worker has 63 young people in their client load, demonstrating the demand for service and the unsustainable workload.

This is the fifth year in which the Youth Coalition has called on the ACT Government to provide recurrent funding for MYS and the second ACT Multicultural Strategy that does not include a commitment to fund this essential service for multicultural young people.

The Community Inclusion Board currently funds \$80,000 to MYS to provide essential services to multicultural young people in the ACT. This funding ceases on 30 June 2009, which will result in the closure of their drop-in service.

The closure of this service will result in a significant gap in service provision and the loss of support to multicultural young people, whom the ACT Government has stated its strong commitment to and acknowledges as a particularly vulnerable group in our community.³¹

The Youth Coalition calls on the ACT Government to maintain the current funding of \$80,000 to enable the service to continue to provide essential support such as case management, drop in, brokerage and resettlement assistance. Additional funding of \$70,000 will assist the service to meet unmet demand and respond to emerging issues, to provide support to other mainstream services to work with multicultural young people and increased capacity to respond to current issues.

Recommendation 16

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* include, as a matter of urgency, a commitment to the recurrent core funding to Multicultural Youth Services, to prevent the closure of its essential drop-in service on 1 July 2009.

5.2 Emerging Need: Young Burmese Refugees

Australia has recognised the significant humanitarian needs of the people of Burma.³² In 2007-08, Australia granted 2961 humanitarian visas to Burmese refugees and it is expected that Burmese people will continue to be one of the largest groups of entrants under Australia's humanitarian program for 2008-09.³³

There are increasing numbers of Burmese refugees, particularly from the Mon, Karen and Chin minority ethnic groups, are settling in the ACT. Humanitarian entrants born in Burma rose to around 14% of entrants to the ACT in 2006-07 from around 8% over the previous five years, reflecting the shifting composition of Australia's Humanitarian Program.³⁴

Youth Coalition consultations have revealed that young Burmese refugees are a particularly isolated group whose needs are not currently being met. We call on the ACT Government to take proactive measures to demonstrate its commitment to refugees by allocating resources to ensure that culturally appropriate and youth specific services are provided for this emerging target group.

Recommendation 27

That the ACT Government allocate targeted resources to support young Burmese refugees and their families in the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 - 2012*.

5.3 Young People and Family Conflict³⁵

The dynamics within multicultural families and communities is often very complex. For multicultural, including newly arrived and refugee young people, juggling family and community expectations with individual goals and aspirations and peer pressures can be challenging.

Some particular issues relating to migrant and refugee families and communities in Australia include:

- **Diverse family roles and relationships**, including:
 - cultural constructions of the family that may include biological or non-biological members;
 - roles and obligations of each family member may be quite different from those expected in a nuclear family;
 - families also vary considerably within communities;
 - assumptions about family make-up cannot be made based on stereotypes; and
 - many families have been totally restructured.
- **Issues for newly arrived families**, including:
 - the loss of status,
 - a deep sense of loss,
 - some families experience a complete class shift on arrival;
 - professionals with overseas qualifications may face unemployment due to a lack of Australian work experience and discrimination;
 - financial pressures (high unemployment among newly arrived people, families may be paying off overseas debts or sending money to relatives overseas);
 - refugees usually arrive with no possessions or assets; having to start their lives again;
 - difficulties in finding affordable / appropriately sized housing and may be forced to live in overcrowded conditions; and
 - limited access to childcare is impacting on the involvement of family members in schools and youth activities, and frequently requiring young people to care for their siblings.
- **Young people and family conflict**, including:
 - facing complex and alien environments;
 - young people taking on the role as advocate for their families;

- power shifts with parents losing dignity and status and young people taking on a greater burden of responsibility;
- juggling the strong expectations by family members of both success within dominant Australian culture and the maintenance of their cultural values and first language;
- intergenerational conflict arising around financial issues, independence, activities outside the home and personal relationships; and
- compounding all of this is a lack of accessible information about Australian laws and culturally appropriate support for parents.

Further issues can include families' fears about young people's acculturation; children and young people's safety; post-traumatic stress and other mental health issues; and families' fears that services are culturally inappropriate and may work to encourage young people to leave home.

In light of these, and other issues, it is crucial that the draft Strategy reflects the importance of having targeted and appropriate services and support for young people and families to reduce family conflict and support transition processes.

Recommendation 28

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* includes actions and targeted resources for young people and families to reduce family conflict and support transition processes.

5.4 Multicultural Young Carers

Services working with multicultural young people have reported an increase in supporting multicultural young people who are carers. Young carers are children and young people who care for or help care within a family affected by the illness, disability, AOD or mental health issues of one of more of its members or friends. There are approximately 11,500 young carers in Canberra, which accounts for 10% of the ACT's youth population.³⁶

Young carers may experience financial hardship, exclusion from opportunities and activities, and negative impacts on their health and wellbeing. However, multicultural young carers may experience additional cultural challenges and barriers to support.

The ACT Government is due to develop a new plan for carers in the ACT, following the expiry of the *ACT Caring for Carers: A Plan of Action 2004 – 2007* (Carers Plan). The Carers Plan included actions to continue to develop and improve culturally appropriate supports for carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.³⁷ In the further development of the draft Strategy, and the next Carers Plan, further discussions are required with service providers and community members to develop policy synergies and for meaningful commitments to be reflected in the draft Strategy.

Recommendation 29

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop synergies with the next *ACT Caring for Carers Plan* to form meaningful actions in relation to multicultural young carers (see also Recommendation 5).

5.5 Care and Protection

Intervention within a family on the grounds of suspected abuse should not be

inhibited or delayed by cultural considerations. At the same time, a knowledge of the cultural framework in which the action or inaction occurred is vital in guiding the intervention and producing a result which is beneficial to the child⁶⁸.

Services working with multicultural young people have reported having to contact Care and Protection Services more frequently. This is due to a range of emerging issues, including domestic violence.

Care and Protection is an issue for all facets of the Canberra community. As discussed in section 5.3 there are many reasons why multicultural young people and their families may be experiencing conflict and require support from Care and Protection Services.

Consultations reveal that more multicultural young people, particularly those aged between 12 – 14 years of age, require targeted and culturally appropriate support.

The Youth Coalition therefore calls on the ACT Government to include specific strategies regarding Care and Protection Services within the draft Strategy.

Recommendation 30

That the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 – 2012* develop specific strategies to address care and protection issues for multicultural young people and their families.

5.6 Multicultural Youth Network

Over the past nine months, over 80 cross-sectoral individuals and services in the ACT have been involved in the development of a *Multicultural Youth Network* to seek to coordinate and connect resources for multicultural young people and their families. The foundational work has included stakeholder identification, a planning day, a stakeholder database, a workplan, two multicultural youth forums, a training day and a newsletter. However, this work cannot continue without allocated resources by the ACT Government.

The *Multicultural Youth Network* would improve supports for multicultural young people, strengthen multicultural youth services (locally and nationally) and raise the profile of multicultural youth issues in the ACT. Network activities would aim to:

- Connect and coordinate youth multicultural resources in the ACT;
- Build the capacity of mainstream services to become ‘youth multicultural’ competent;
- Map services and develop a directory;
- Provide opportunities for collaborations and partnerships;
- Distribute information and resources; and
- Promote training and professional development opportunities.

Recommendation 31

That the ACT Government commit to resourcing a *Multicultural Youth Network* in the ACT in the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 - 2012*.

6. Where to from here?

The Youth Coalition would like to again thank the ACT Government for the opportunity to contribute to the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 2012*. Our submission reflects significant cross-sectoral consultation and has identified many opportunities upon which the draft Strategy can be further strengthened.

The current strategy, *ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009*, does not expire until the end of the year. In light of the time that still exists within the current Strategy and the many issues identified throughout this submission we call on the ACT Government to extend the process of the development of the draft Strategy throughout 2009 and to work with key stakeholders, such as the Multicultural Youth Affairs Network, to collaboratively develop strong evidence based policy in the ACT.

Recommendation 32

That the ACT Government commit to continuing the consultation process with stakeholders throughout 2009 to redraft the current version of the *Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2009 - 2012*.

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- ¹¹ ACT Government (2006) ACT Multicultural Strategy 2006 – 2009, Canberra, p 45.
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- ²² ACT Government (September 2008) Draft Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013, Canberra.
- ²³ ACT research about young people and help-seeking behaviours conducted by Professor Debra Rickwood; and various policy documents produced by Multicultural Mental Health Australia (www.mmha.org.au)
- ²⁴ Multicultural Mental Health Australia (Accessed 24 March 2009) Glossary.
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- ³⁵ This section is an excerpt adapted from: Centre for Multicultural Youth (Accessed 27 March 2009) *Family and Community*. www.cmy.org.au For further information, particularly regarding practice issues, visit: Centre for Multicultural Youth. www.cmy.net.au/Assets/583/1/NAYSS_InfoSheet04_FamilyConflict.pdf *NAYSS Information Sheet 4: Family Conflict & The NAYSS Target Group*. Date accessed. 27/03/09.
- ³⁶ Youth Coalition of the ACT (2008) Young Carers Research, Canberra
- ³⁷ ACT Government (2007) Third Progress Report: Caring for Carers, A Plan of Action 2004 – 2007, Canberra
- ³⁸ NSW Child Protection Council. (1993) Child Protection in Non English Speaking Communities: Culture – No Excuse, p 5.