

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Internet Search Engine Services Online Safety Code
C/- Committee Secretariat
ec.sen@aph.gov.au

5 November 2025

Re: Internet Search Engine Services Online Safety Code

Dear Committee Chair, Deputy Chair and Members,

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) was grateful for the opportunity to appear before the Committee on 13 October 2025. We write to provide additional input regarding the implementation of the social media minimum age restrictions.

1. Recognising the benefits of online participation

We echo the reflections of young people who spoke before the Committee, including Caitlin Blanch, Leo Puglisi and Lauren Pettenuzzo, of the diverse benefits of social media for young people. Just as CMY have heard from multicultural young people, these platforms are vital spaces for building identity, connection and belonging, and to engage in advocacy and creativity, learning essential life skills. The social media age restrictions risk cutting off these benefits without addressing the root causes of online harms.

2. The need for digital literacy for parents and young people

Effective, culturally responsive digital literacy programs must be adequately resourced to provide needed community education in conjunction with implementation of age restrictions. Many parents we heard from reported wanting to better understand and support their children online. In the absence of relevant or accessible programs, community organisations have been left to bridge the gap. For example, the South Sudanese Community Support Group (Victoria) coordinated multiple parenting education sessions on social media, gaming and digital literacy to share technical knowledge and tools to engage in dialogue with their children. Demonstrating the power of community-led, trusted approaches. Without such initiatives, young people and parents will remain ill-equipped to navigate misinformation, scams and other emerging risks.

3. Supporting communication through trusted community networks

Community and youth organisations play a key role in sharing accurate information with multicultural communities. Government should invest in helping these services develop alternative communication and outreach channels post-ban. Existing mechanism, such as national bodies like the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN), with state partners such as CMY, are well placed to deliver coordinated, culturally informed education and support.

4. Investing in safe, youth-led spaces for connection

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Implementation must include opportunities to build and sustain alternative, youth-led spaces for connection, both online and offline. This should include supporting partnership between large and grassroots organisations, including youth-led groups and individuals already fostering these spaces through adapting schemes such as the Department of Home Affairs' 'Modernised Multicultural Grants Program.'

We appreciate the Committee's continued attention to these issues and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to further discussions on collaborative community-based implementation.

CMY have drawn on the following to inform this contribution and encourage the Committee to consider this publication as part of their review:

- **Attachment 1:** Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Blocked: the Social Media Ban, Multicultural Young People and Settlement*. (Carlton: CMY, 2025).
- **Attachment 2:** Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, *MYAN Youth Engagement Strategy*. (Carlton: MYAN, 2025).
- **Attachment 3:** Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, *Meaningful partnership with young people*. (Carlton: MYAN, 2024).

Should you require further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards.

Carmel Guerra OAM
Chief Executive Officer

Blocked: the Social Media Ban, Multicultural Young People and Settlement



Blocked: the Social Media Ban, Multicultural Young People and Settlement

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This document was first published in August 2025.

Suggested Citation: Centre for Multicultural Youth, Blocked: the Social Media Ban, Multicultural Young People and Settlement. (Carlton: CMY, 2025).

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Author Positionality Statement

The first author is a first-generation migrant who arrived in Australia as a child, accompanying her family, and is of South-Asian descent. The second author is Australian-born of Anglo-Celtic descent. We acknowledge that our own lived experiences can influence the study design and interpretation of results. We approached the study with sensitivity and a commitment to amplifying underrepresented voices. We consider our diversity, individual experiences, and age (with one researcher being under 30 years old) to be strengths in understanding and communicating the experiences of young people and workers.

Acknowledgement of Country

CMY acknowledges the traditional owners of the lands on which we work across Victoria, paying our respect to elders past and present and recognise the ongoing connection to and care for Country of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. CMY offices in Carlton, Dandenong, Sunshine, Ballarat, Melton and Gippsland are located on the traditional lands of the Kulin nations.

In recognition of CMY's aspiration that all young people are valued and influential, we acknowledge and thank young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for their leadership, friendship and courage to share their stories and culture. In doing so, we acknowledge our shared history and the importance of working and walking together to build our shared understanding and foster strong Victorian communities.

CMY values respect for diversity, and in keeping with our aspiration that all young people are free and equal, we respect distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural differences, beliefs, values and languages, and recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights to self-determination, culture and land.

About CMY

CMY is a Victorian not for profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia. CMY believes diversity is a cornerstone of Australia's success; respect for everyone's human rights is essential for a fair and equal society; and everyone should be able to feel like they belong and can participate fully. This is reflected in CMY's 35 years of working with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to become connected, empowered, and influential Australians.

Contributions

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) would like to thank the young people and CMY staff who gave their time to be interviewed and share their experiences to inform this paper. Special thanks to Alfadzni Haddimah for his research contributions to this paper. Additionally, we would like to acknowledge the time and contributions of:

- Kensington Neighbourhood Homework Club
- Wyndham Community and Education Centre Inc. (WCEC)
- Victorian Multicultural Youth Alliance (VMYA)

CMY acknowledges the support of the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs for this project.

Executive Summary

Late in 2024, Australia became the first country globally to legislate a ban on social media for young people. This landmark legislation, the Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) 2024 Act (the Social Media Ban) is due to come into effect in December 2025, with the stated aim of protecting young people under 16 from the potential harms of social media by banning their access to prohibited platforms.

While the ban has been defended largely as a response to parental and community concerns for young peoples' mental health and digital safety, critics argue that a blanket ban alone fails to address these core concerns and that there is insufficient evidence to justify it. Concerns have also been raised that a blanket ban unnecessarily limits the rights of young people and, in so doing, risks harm to some by limiting important access to and participation in digital life. Advocates have suggested additional measures are needed, such as stronger platform regulation and practical support to families and young people to navigate digital platforms safely, arguing such measures would better address risks posed by social media use.

Despite the Social Media Ban's unique and far-reaching consequences, there was very limited opportunity for community consultation during the legislative process, including with the young people it would ultimately impact. Research shows that some marginalised young people, including multicultural and newly arrived young people, derive unique benefits from social media that are not readily available to them elsewhere.ⁱ Research also shows that digital technology use can facilitate participation and support critical connection for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds in Australia, especially those who face exclusion from more formal mechanisms for connection and expression.ⁱⁱ This includes newly arrived young people who are navigating a period of transition during a critical stage of their development, when access to and participation in civil life is critical.ⁱⁱⁱ This paper explores the Social Media Ban and its potential impacts from the perspective of young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds and their families, with a focus on those newly arrived to Australia.

Between October 2024 and May 2025 CMY undertook a series of consultations with multicultural young people, their families, and those who work with them. Consultations explored the unique experiences of newly arrived and multicultural young people using social media, and views on the likely impacts of the proposed Social Media Ban.

Overall, findings suggest that a ban is unlikely to address the underlying digital safety concerns of multicultural young people and their families. Additionally, the ban

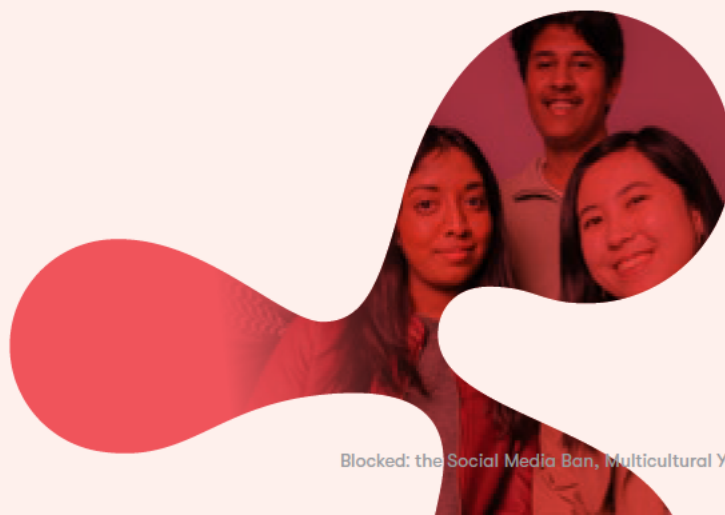
is likely to have broader implications that policy makers and services working with multicultural young people and those who are newly arrived must carefully consider. These include:

- building the knowledge and skills of young people and families to safely and confidently navigate digital worlds;
- addressing systemic risks inherent with digital platforms, including for those aged 16 years and over and for platforms not covered by the ban;
- finding alternatives to maintain connections with and effectively serve young people once access to social media is limited under the ban, especially for marginalised and more newly arrived cohorts, and;
- how to appropriately resource and guide frontline workers supporting multicultural young people and families to manage impacts once implementation of the ban commences.

More broadly, the Social Media Ban illustrates the potential in Australian policymaking to risk (or at least be seen to risk) prioritising expediency and socially palatable options over complex, rights-based, evidence-based solutions. This raises fundamental questions about whose interests are valued and prioritised in our policymaking system, whose voices are heard, and what rights we are willing to compromise in the process. These questions are especially important when we are considering policies that impact upon the needs and interest of groups who are regularly marginalised and face persistent barriers to participation and influence in Australian society, such as young people and those from refugee and migrant backgrounds.^{iv}




Key findings

- 1** Social media is integral to newly arrived young people's lives. It serves as a primary tool for maintaining connections with family and friends overseas, building new friendships and connections in their new home, and accessing information about local services, events, and opportunities.
- 2** Experiences of racism and cyberbullying on social media are common for newly arrived and multicultural young people. However, social media also provides opportunities for solidarity, support, and collective action.
- 3** For some newly arrived young people, social media is the most accessible way to build positive social networks, stay informed and access relevant support in their new home. A ban risks their digital exclusion, which could harm their mental health, increase social isolation, and disrupt successful settlement.
- 4** Multicultural young people and their supporters are concerned about social media addiction and excessive screen time. While these issues can cause poor mental health, through distraction and increased stress, outright bans are unlikely to change behaviour and additional measures are needed to support healthy digital behaviours.
- 5** Family engagement with young people's online activity and digital literacy varies widely. Many families, especially those who are newly arrived to Australia, face challenges in managing the social media use of their children and young people and keeping them safe online.
- 6** Young people want to be part of the solution. Newly arrived and multicultural young people want more opportunities to participate in policy development and to co-design digital safety and engagement initiatives.






Recommendations




The Australian Government and State/Territory Governments must ensure that young people are given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to legislation and policies that impact them.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>The Department of Families Fairness Housing amend the Victorian youth strategy <u>'Our Promise, Your Future: Victoria's Youth Strategy 2022-2027'</u> and the Federal youth strategy <u>'Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make.'</u> to include mandatory requirements for consultation and co-design in legislative development that impacts young people, with a focus on strengthening engagement with multicultural young people including those who are newly arrived. This could be done through advisory councils or regular forums for example.</p>	<p>Despite the disproportionate impact of this legislation on young people, their voices have largely been absent due to limited consultation windows, and inaccessible legislative and policy development processes.</p>	<p>Policy decisions are better informed by those most affected, leading to fairer, and more effective legislation. Young people feel empowered, and policies become more representative of community needs.</p>

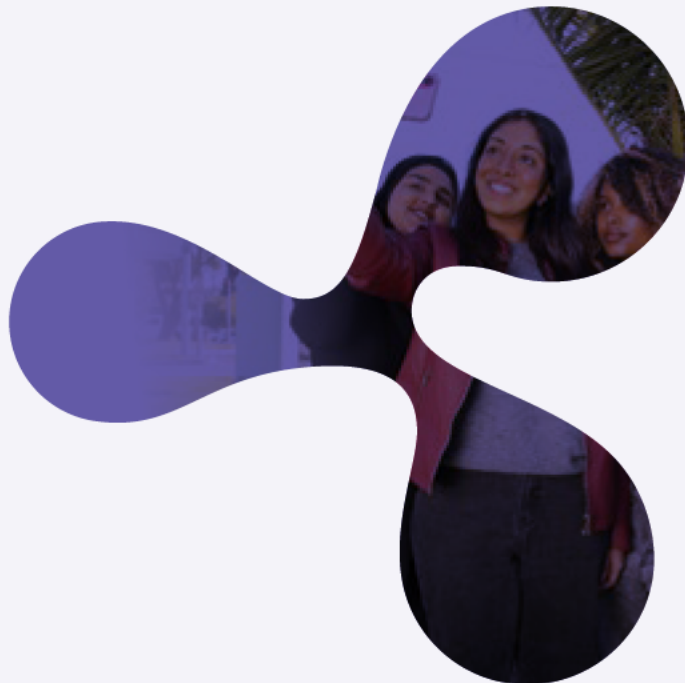
The Australian Government must engage with existing culturally inclusive online 'third spaces' to uplift these where they exist, and invest in grassroots, community-led digital belonging initiatives.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>The Department of Home Affairs must fund partnerships between digital literacy providers and settlement services to meet youth demand for digital and in-person spaces for newly arrived young people to socialise and interact with their local and identified communities.</p> <p>This funding should support community-led moderation and peer-mentors to ensure spaces are safe, for example the <u>South Sudanese Minds</u> initiative, and the <u>Good Things Australia community grants</u>.</p>	<p>Social media is no longer a purely recreational tool, but a vital 'lifeline' for many young people to access information, connection and support. Limited access to physical 'third places' for many young people means that online communities play a critical role in social inclusion. A blanket ban on access to social media risks exacerbating feelings of isolation, particularly for those experiencing barriers to participation.</p> <p>Investment in safe, supported digital spaces co-designed with young people provides an inclusive alternative.</p>	<p>Young people have access to safe, trusted, culturally and identity affirming digital spaces that support connection, self-expression and identity formation.</p> <p>Communities and young people are empowered to lead local, culturally responsive solutions.</p>




The Australian Government must include digital inclusion as a core settlement outcome for young people. This would measure whether those under 16 have accessible, digital and non-digital pathways to build social connections.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>The Department of Home Affairs incorporate belonging and identity indicators into settlement program evaluations by implementing the <u>National Youth Settlement Framework</u> across youth settlement services and beyond the first five years.</p> <p>Include both qualitative and quantitative measures of belonging, identity, and social connectedness—including both online and offline pathways for connection.</p> <p>This could be measured through longitudinal data collection such as part of the <u>Building a New Life in Australia</u> longitudinal study, or through the <u>Australian Digital Inclusion Index</u> being expanded to collect data around migrant and refugee background young people, and newly arrived young people.</p>	<p>Belonging is a significant indicator of social integration, however young Australian's report lower levels of belonging. Systematically measuring this can allow services and government to better understand the role of the digital in belonging during settlement, and to quickly mitigate any potential negative unintended consequences of the ban for newly arrived young people.</p>	<p>Settlement programs become more responsive to the holistic needs of young people, including digital needs, leading to improved social cohesion and stronger community connections</p>









The Australian Government must strengthen protections against racism and discrimination online by stronger moderation of content and algorithms.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>Strengthen enforceability of Australian regulation and legislation for social media platforms. This could be achieved by adopting in full the final recommendations of the <u>Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society</u>.</p> <p>This should include stronger regulation of the use of algorithms, as proposed under recommendation 4, by requiring social media platforms to: implement content and algorithm filters, enforce content moderation to block racist and hateful material, remove harmful content immediately, and be 'safe by design' regarding algorithms.</p> <p>Additional measures should strengthen the eSafety Commissioner's regulatory enforcement powers, including to set industry standards, and inform Australia's role in global collaboration to develop global regulatory frameworks and mobilise multilateral pressure to hold platforms accountable.</p>	<p>More than one in two young Australians report seeing hateful comments about cultural or religious groups online, with Islamophobic or anti-Muslim and anti-asylum seeker content making up a large proportion.^v However few young people feel equipped to challenge or report this.^{vi}</p> <p>Proactive content moderation, and consistent enforcement of rules online would reduce exposure to hate speech and create safer digital spaces.</p>	<p>Experts recommend strengthening platform regulation as the most effective way to improve online safety for young people.</p> <p>This approach protects young people from online racism, fosters safer and more inclusive communities, and enables authorities to enforce legislation while holding platforms accountable for user safety by design.</p>

The Australian Government and State/Territory Governments must enhance digital literacy support for multicultural and newly arrived communities and young people.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>In line with recommendation 7 of the <u>Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society's</u> interim report, fund tailored digital literacy programs for multicultural young people and their families, co-designed and implemented with communities and young people, to support tailored and place based approaches.</p> <p>This could be achieved by the Australian and State/Territory Governments supporting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expansion of youth-led and school-based digital education programs, like <u>PROJECT ROCKIT 'Digital Futures'</u> to partner with community organisations to reach more multicultural young people, for example in English language schools and community homework clubs. • co-designing grants programs with young people, such as the <u>Good Things Foundation's Building Digital Skills'</u> and the Department of Home Affairs <u>Modernised Multicultural Grants Program.</u> 	<p>Parents report a significant digital knowledge gap, feeling less informed about the uses and risks of social media. Research suggests many multicultural parents are unaware of government initiatives aimed at protecting their children online.^{xi}</p> <p>Recently arrived multicultural cohorts score far lower on the digital inclusion index than the broader refugee and migrant background community and general population, highlighting variations within multicultural populations and the need for tailored programs.^{xii}</p> <p>Research shows that such programs should include in-language support for families to better understand and engage with their young people's social media use; focus on practical, culturally relevant skills beyond basic technical ability; and include guidance on Australian norms and values regarding young people's digital participation, digital wellbeing and safety, as well as relevant laws and supports.^{xiii}</p>	<p>By investing in community informed digital literacy programs and expanding youth-focused digital wellbeing workshops, multicultural communities will be better equipped to engage in their children's online lives.</p> <p>This approach will enhance intergenerational communication around digital safety and empower parents with the tools to actively support their children, fostering safer, more inclusive online environments for multicultural young people.</p>

The Australian Government and State/Territory Governments must proactively mitigate the likely negative impacts of the Social Media Ban for newly arrived and multicultural young people.

 Policy solution	 Evidence and rationale	 Outcome
<p>In addition to implementing stronger platform accountability and youth and family digital supports, the Australian and State/Territory Governments must mandate, and support settlement and other services working with newly arrived young people and their families to collect data on the impacts of the ban on their access to information, connections and support.</p> <p>Actively support youth services, including settlement services, to transition to other platforms and modes for connecting and communicating with young people online.</p> <p>Engage such services and supports to work collaboratively with young people and families on understanding the ban and what it means.</p> <p>There should also be mechanisms for feedback from young people and communities during and following implementation of to ensure it is responsive to their needs.</p>	<p>Given the potential for disproportionate impacts of a ban on newly arrived and multicultural young people, it is essential to accurately understand how/if their access to services are impacted once the ban comes into effect, and to take quick action to mitigate this beforehand and once risks are identified.</p>	<p>The impact of a ban on diverse cohorts of young people is clearly understood and can be evaluated meaningfully. This approach allows services to proactively mitigate against any negative impacts and to respond effectively to unexpected consequences once the ban takes effect, to ensure sustained connection and support to newly arrived and multicultural young people.</p>



"I think that [the ban] will just mean kids will not [learn] social media etiquette and digital literacy. The same problems will occur with just a higher age group now. Research has shown greatly mixed results from around the world as bullying still occurs, mental health problems still occurs."

- multicultural young person, 18 - 24 years old

Background



Social media is a central part of young people's lives, –with around 95% of young Australians reporting they use social media daily.^{xxiv} Social media serves as a primary means of information and communication, self-expression and community building for young people. For many, especially those from newly arrived backgrounds, social media platforms are essential for maintaining relationships across borders, accessing information and finding identity-affirming 'third spaces' in a new country.^{xxv} Social media is equally an important tool for governments, businesses, and not-for-profit services and organisations, enabling connection and communication with the community.

While the benefits of social media are considerable, the rapid evolution of social media has also brought new risks. Most of this concern has focused on links between the steady decline in youth mental health and an unregulated and unsafe social media environment – although this relationship is complex and dynamic, and research remains mixed on the nature and extent of social media in this decline.^{xxvi} Other concerns including exposure to misinformation, cyberbullying, breaches of privacy and harmful content have grown sharply, alongside high-profile incidents of platforms being used to cause deliberate harm.^{xxvii} Momentum for regulation has intensified as governments currently lack the tools or authority to intervene effectively, and acknowledge that platforms are unwilling to self-regulate.^{xxviii} This climate has fuelled political and public support for stronger interventions, including direct calls for a social media ban.^{xxix}

However, the ban has attracted significant criticism from youth and digital rights advocates^{xxx} who argue it is rushed, disproportionate and was developed with limited consultation of young people.^{xxxi} Related concerns have emphasised that it also risks overlooking the particular needs of some youth cohorts, including newly arrived and multicultural young people, with unintended consequences (such as reduced access to critical information during settlement) the likely result.^{xxxii} Instead, a range of alternatives have been promoted, many reflecting proposals from the Australian Parliament's own inquiry into social media. These include greater regulation of platforms and safety by design principles while also proposing alternatives, including a public health response to the youth mental health 'crisis', stronger regulation of platform design with a focus on user safety, and investment in digital and media literacy for young people and their supporters.^{xxxiii}

Despite offering proportionate, evidence-based solutions and raising valid concerns about unintended harms, these proposals have gained less traction with legislators than the ban itself, raising important questions about evidence-based policymaking and democratic accountability in our system. In particular, the Social Media Ban shines light on systemic issues with how policy decisions can be made about children and young people, those directly affected by this policy but largely excluded from meaningful participation in its development, given they have notably less power to influence decision-making in our systems.



Third Space: Refers to environments where people navigate and negotiate different parts of their identity in a space beyond their home and formal institutions (e.g. school/work) and serve as a critical site for connection, expression and community building. For young people with intersectional identities, social media can provide a vital sense of community and support.

Multicultural: Includes people who are of first- or second-generation migrant or refugee background, as well as those who have grandparents who were of migrant or refugee background, or who identify as 'multicultural'.

Newly arrived: Someone who was born overseas and has lived in Australia for a relatively short amount of time, including young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. According to the Federal Government, someone newly-arrived, has lived in Australia for five years or less. Other definitions vary according to the length of time it is considered to take to settle in Australia. This paper refers to newly-arrived young people using the Federal Government's definition.

Young person: A reference to young person or young people in this paper relates to those who are aged 12 – 24 years.

Policy context

Australia

In the decade leading up to 2024, Australia and many other countries developed of a range of local and global frameworks and laws aimed to improve digital safety, especially for children and young people.^{xxxiv} In 2024 alone, the Australian Government implemented or progressed multiple reforms relating to online safety. These included:

The Basic Online Safety Expectations (BOSE) (in force as of May 2024)

Development of industry codes and standards to address illegal and restricted online content (in progress)

Age Assurance Trial (\$6.5 million committed May 2024) to determine how to regulate access to online pornography and social media (in progress)

Changes to the Privacy Act 1988, and the development of a Children's Online Privacy Code (legislation passed in November 2024, development of the Code is in progress)

Statutory Review of the Online Safety Act 2021 (February 2025)

Australia joins UN Global Digital Compact recognises digital access and participation as essential to achieving human rights ^{xxxv} (October 2024)

Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society (final report tabled in November 2024)

Despite these measures, the existing online safety regime continued to be deemed inadequate for protecting young people and calls for more robust regulation and greater accountability of technology companies continued.^{xxxv}

The Social Media Minimum Age Act was legislated on 29 November 2024 and is due to come into effect in December 2025, and will be reviewed two years later. However, this timeline is not guaranteed, as age verification and other enforcement capabilities are not yet usable.

Legislating a global first 'Social Media Ban'

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced an inquiry into a social media age ban. South Australia proposed under-14 ban (14–16 with parental consent), while Victoria signalled support but commenced consulted.^{xxxvii}



10 September 2024



7 November 2024

Before states released their consultation findings, the Australian Government announced a minimum age of 16 for social media,^{xxiv} citing consultation with youth, parents, experts, and governments.^{xxxix}



18 November 2024

The Joint Select Committee's final report was released: 'Social media: the good, the bad and the ugly'. It did not recommend an age ban and urged tailored regulations to improve platform safety and enforce company duty of care.^{xxxv}



21 November 2024

Despite inquiry findings, the Government introduced the *Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024* following public consultation that was open for only 24-hours.



Late November 2024

The Senate Committee recommended the Bill proceed, acknowledging opposition but supporting harm mitigation.^{xi}



29 November 2024

Despite continued opposition from across the political spectrum, Australia passed the world's first Social Media Ban.



10 December 2025

It is expected the ban will commence in December, following the completion of age verification trials.

Global Trends

Australia's approach to regulating young people's social media use is unprecedented globally, with most other countries focusing instead on addressing young people's online safety through measures such as data privacy, parental consent and platform accountability instead of blanket bans. In the United States, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) restricts data collection from children under 14, while proposed legislation such as the Kids Online Safety Act (KOSA) seeks to impose a duty of care on platforms to prevent and mitigate harm to young people, and to prohibit targeted advertising to young people under 17 years old. In Europe, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) limits data collection from children under 13 years old and sets 16 years as the minimum age of consent for data processing. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Online Safety Act 2023 imposes a duty of care on platforms to protect users from harmful content; including preventing illegal content, preventing young people from accessing content that is inappropriate for their age, and providing parents and young people with clear ways to report issues. By contrast, and in the absence of evidence of its likely effectiveness, Australia has positioned itself as a global test case, with countries the UK and New Zealand watching closely as they debate similar bans.^{xii}



Discussion

The Social Media Ban represents a significant shift in how online safety for young people in Australia is approached, and the role of platforms and families in this. While the legislation is intended to be in the best interests of young people, and to protect them from the harms associated with social media use, the blanket ban is a blunt social policy instrument that is likely to have significant negative and unintended consequences, particularly for minority youth. Understanding the needs and interests of the young people who will be impacted is critical to ensuring

implementation is informed and that the most negative impacts are prevented. This discussion, drawing on the reviewed literature, survey responses and consultations (detailed in [Annexure 1](#) and [Annexure 2](#)) explores the perspectives of multicultural and newly arrived young people and families, and those working with them, on the ban and its likely impacts. It is structured around key themes arising from the survey and consultations, which were:

1. The use of social media to cultivate **a sense of belonging**.
2. The potential harms of social media in relation to **racism and cyberbullying**.
3. The dual effects of social media in relation to **mental health and addiction**.
4. **Challenges and opportunities for families** in managing children's and young people's use of social media.
5. Considering **newly arrived young people in implementation**: What is necessary to ensure these reforms do not inadvertently undermine social inclusion or settlement outcomes?



1. Connection and identity – cultivating a sense of belonging

Belonging and the Settlement Experience

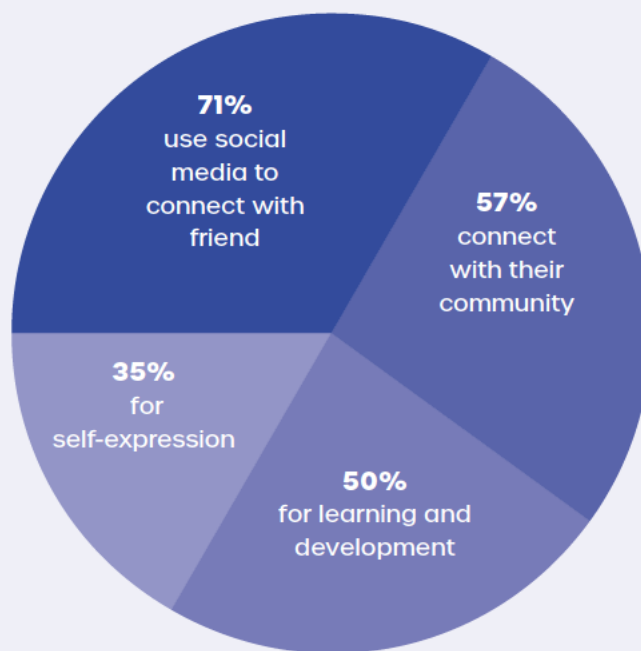
Belonging is a key indicator of successful settlement for young people. It means feeling part of something greater than oneself, having the capacity to participate in cultural life, and experiencing a sense of self and social connectedness.^{xlii} The migrant and refugee journey can disrupt young people's established social networks and connection to place, threatening their existing sense of belonging.^{xliii}

Traditionally, sites of belonging can be understood as family, schools or education providers and the local neighbourhood. However, over the past decade, where and how young people establish a sense of belonging has shifted. Digital spaces, especially social media platforms, have become key sites where young people forge their identities and develop community connections. Far from being a trivial or purely recreational tool, social media platforms now operate as critical 'third spaces' and help build bridging and bonding social capital in the settlement context.^{xliiv}

Young People's Perspectives on Connection, Identity and Support

Multicultural and newly arrived young people repeatedly emphasised that social media was essential to maintaining ties with family overseas, accessing shared cultural content and forming identity affirming connections. They also reported using social media for practical reasons such as finding events and opportunities, practising English, and connecting with groups and networks.

Newly arrived and multicultural young people averaged 4 hours daily on social media. This is significantly higher than the average young Victorian, who is reported to spend 2.5 hours daily on social media.^{xliv} This higher usage may indicate that multicultural and newly arrived young people rely on online spaces to build belonging and identity, especially when they have limited opportunities for offline connections. However, multicultural and newly arrived young people are not a homogenous group, and many newly arrived young people and those experiencing higher levels of financial stress face barriers to digital



Multicultural young people surveyed mirror these usage patterns.

access that impact their usage.^{xlv} As such, needs are shaped by each young person's unique perspective and identity, and it is important to consider the role of intersectionality in shaping experiences.

Social Media as a Critical 'Third Space'

Social media platforms function as critical 'third spaces' for young people – informal spaces, away from home and school, where they can explore their identity, share culture and connect with friends.^{xlvii} For young people with intersectional identities, social media can provide a vital sense of community and support.^{xlviii} It helps them navigate life in a new culture and forge their identity. These platforms can build both bonding capital (connection with existing friends/family) and bridging capital (engagement with new culture), supporting their integration, and can act as a buffer against migration stress.^{xlix}



Bridging social capital: amongst people of dissimilar backgrounds, and is useful for connecting with external information, and resources, and creating broader social identities as we get to know those different to us.

Bonding social capital: amongst social relationships of similar people, promoting reciprocity, support and solidarity.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a framework that recognises how identities shaped by overlapping and interconnected experiences of race, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic status combine to create unique forms of discrimination and privilege within systems of power.

"I use it for like, Islamic pages – there are people who learn things all together and who understand you. I don't get that in day-to-day life, school is limited, just classes. Social media is different – you can be more yourself than when you're at school or social settings."

– multicultural young person, 16 years old

Online platforms allow multicultural and newly arrived young people to explore their identity as separate but related to their 'offline' selves. For example, young people shared that growing up in regional and rural areas as a diverse young person can present many challenges. They explained that they can feel isolated from their communities as there are not many people who share their cultural background. Research shows that social media is an important tool for connecting rural and regional young people as it can act as an essential bridge to cultivate connections and relationships with other people with similar identities, or heritage and background.¹

However, there is significant evidence that social media can also present risks where young people can be exposed to harmful actors, such as influencers within the 'manosphere' who propagate misogyny online. The eSafety Commissioner's 2021 report, 'The digital lives of Aussie teens', reports around one third (30%) of young people have been contacted by a stranger or someone they didn't know online, with one in five (20%) receiving inappropriate or unwanted content.¹¹

Social media is also a key medium through which newly arrived young people access information relating to settlement and life in Australia. Settlement organisations, like most services and groups in Australia, rely on social media platforms to disseminate information and connect with young people. The ban raises significant concerns about how services will reach young people once they lose access to social media.

Social media is often used by services to translate information that is less accessible such as on government websites, into more accessible or engaging formats for youth audiences. This sometimes gives better exposure to intended audiences than traditional sources, with young people reporting they do not regularly use traditional news sites or government websites for information.

Social media, belonging, identity and youth settlement

A social media ban without sufficient complementary measures to fill the gaps creates risks of further isolating already marginalised young people. It has the potential to undermine the ability of those more newly arrived to forge identity, access cultural content, and develop language and literacy skills essential for effective settlement. Barriers to accessing mainstream platforms, where civic information, rights, norms, and services are widely shared mean newly arrived young people may miss out on critical support significant to their settlement.

What is needed?

Any blanket ban must be accompanied by opportunities for young people to build and sustain alternative spaces for social connection, as well as to access and share key information. Culturally responsive, and safe 'third spaces', such as youth-led digital hubs, should be resourced and developed. These should extend beyond basic chat-based platforms, and provide essential information for newly arrived and multicultural young people. These safe spaces must address privacy concerns, as young people may not feel safe sharing personal information and experiences in spaces regulated or auspiced by government, other formal institutions, or their own community.

Young people use online spaces in ways that are distinct to traditional institutions. Youth-led and community-based organisations play a critical role in supporting newly arrived and multicultural young people by fostering a genuine sense of trust and safety, as their lived experiences are shared and understood by facilitators of these digital spaces.^{xxxix} Policy and program responses must invest in sustainable, youth-led initiatives, not just co-design, to ensure that the needs of this cohort are adequately met.

Further, the Government must support settlement and multicultural youth services to transition to alternative platforms to support a digital presence that can connect and communicate with young people online but outside of prohibited social media platforms. Service providers advised that they would continue to connect and support with young people on the platforms young people moved to and used. As such, resourcing services to transition to and work collaboratively to support young people in these spaces, will be essential to mitigate negative impacts for newly arrived young people.



"You all think your restrictions work - adults, parents, schools, even the government - but people still find ways around it no matter how hard you try."

- multicultural young person, 18 - 24 years old

2. Racism and cyber bullying

Racism in the digital age

Online racism and cyber bullying are an extension of the everyday discrimination that young people face in schools, workplaces and public spaces. This is amplified in digital spaces that lack adequate regulation and adult oversight. A major concern newly arrived and multicultural young people reported was regularly seeing racist content online. This is consistent with findings from Victoria's Anti-Racism Strategy 2024 - 2029, which reported that more than half of young people and migrants had seen hate speech online (53%), which negatively impacted their mental health and caused emotional stress (58%).ⁱⁱⁱ

Young people reported racism and bullying occurred in a variety of ways – 'explicitly', from overt hate speech and discriminatory comments or disparaging memes/emojis that perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and 'subtly', taking the form of exclusion or microaggressions.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

"I received really racist comments on TikTok video my friend and I posted ... about me wearing a headscarf, things like that."

- multicultural young person, 16 years old

Experiencing racism online has been linked to serious mental health impacts, including isolation, lower self-esteem and a diminished sense of belonging.^{lv} This is exacerbated for those navigating settlement and cultural adjustment within the first few years of arrival in a new country. Research has found that racism can act as a powerful barrier to successful settlement, with young people reporting negative impacts such as erosion of trust in others, affected eating and fear for their physical safety.^{lv}

Lack of support and platform moderation

Many young people reported feeling unsupported by platforms as content moderation was inconsistent and reporting to platforms rarely led to meaningful outcomes. This has been reported as a widespread problem.^{vi} Self-regulation by platforms has been criticised by experts, largely because of the active use of algorithms, which by their nature promote harmful content to young people, as this material is more likely to generate higher interactions, even if they are negative.^{vii} As a result of platforms failure to intervene, young people reported often feeling they were left to manage racism and other unsafe content on their own.

The anonymity of social media platforms can also embolden perpetrators and leave people feeling powerless to respond or seek recourse. The eSafety Commissioner supports those who have reported abuse from anonymous accounts by alerting social media services and assisting with removal of content.^{viii} However multicultural and newly arrived young people are known to be less likely to report abuse, often because of language barriers or lack of knowledge or access to support networks to be able to report or challenge racism online.^{ix}

Young people talked about trusted adults, including teachers and family members being dismissive of their experiences online and not understanding the impact of online racism. Research shows that young people in English Language Schools receive less digital support from teachers than those in mainstream education programs.^x Most young people said they do not speak to parents/carers about these experiences at all, due to fear they would not understand, or would further chastise them for using social media. This could stem from a majority of parents reportedly perceiving social media as 'bad' or 'unhealthy' for young people, and a 'distraction from the real world'.^{xi}

Most young people and families reported that conversations about social media focused exclusively on screen time, rather than meaningful engagement or safety. This often leaves young people feeling misunderstood and reluctant to share their concerns or experiences with adults.



Case Study: SOUTH SUDANESE MINDS

The 'South Sudanese Minds' initiative, co-designed by young South Sudanese Australians used social media to promote mental health awareness through culturally relevant programs like Instagram Live talent showcases, and intergenerational Facebook conversations. Supported by TACSI, coHealth and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, this project showed how youth-led and community driven programs can use social media in powerful, tailored ways to foster connection and wellbeing.

Patterns of usage and exposure

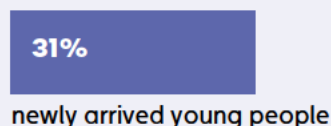
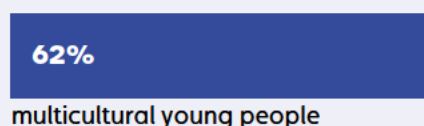
According to research, a high rate of exposure to racism online, both direct and vicarious, may be linked to time spent on social media.^{lxiii} Both newly arrived and multicultural young people reported spending on average 4+ hours daily on social media, compared to the average of 2.5 hours daily for Australian teens.^{lxiii} As such, it is possible that the newly arrived and multicultural young people consulted were more likely to interact with racist content given their increased usage.

"If I told my dad, he would just say 'we had it [racism] so much worse in my day', he doesn't understand what it's like on social media."

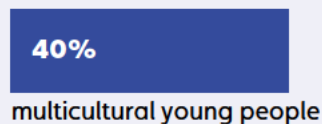
- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

Young people told us they believe that algorithms were to blame for the spread of racist content. Research also supports this, suggesting algorithms reinforce existing biases and normalise racism by creating echo chambers.^{lxiv} While some young people reported actively curating their feeds to encourage more inclusive content, others reported feeling powerless to respond.

Concerned about racism on social media



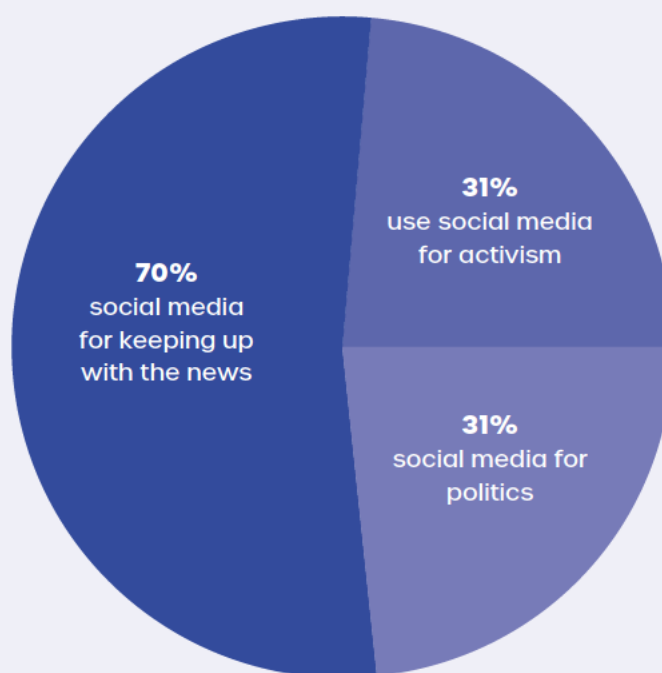
Concerned about cyberbullying on social media



Notably, more multicultural young people surveyed were concerned about racism and cyberbullying on social media (62% and 31%), than newly arrived young people (40% and 30%). However, these issues were still the second most common concern for newly arrived young people. This difference may be because multicultural young people were more likely to use social media for activism (31%), keeping up with the news (70%), and politics (31%), while newly arrived young people reported using social media for politics and news less often (10% and 40%). This is consistent with research findings that show multicultural young people participate in 'active citizenship' in more informal ways, such as through political activism, compared to their newly arrived counterparts, and how digital participation often mirrors trends offline.^{lxv}

Newly arrived young people may be less likely to engage with political and civic activities online as they often face substantial barriers to participation, including limited social networks, unfamiliarity with opportunities, and language and literacy challenges. The early settlement period is also crowded with critical priorities, like learning new systems and adjusting to their new environment.^{lxvi} These factors may contribute to their lower reporting of political engagement online, and fewer concerns about racism than young people who are more settled in Australia.^{lxvii}

Multicultural young people were more likely to use social media for:



Echo chamber: An echo chamber, also known as a filter bubble, is an environment where a person mostly encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own.

From the eSafety Commissioner's glossary of terms ([see here](#))



"[My parents] don't understand, they think real racism is getting thrown off a bus ... they don't think my cyberbullying racism is important."

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

Social media, racism, cyberbullying and youth settlement

A social media ban may inadvertently hinder the settlement process for newly arrived young people because:

- it limits access to news and information, especially for those who rely on social media to remain updated about their home country and engage with content from their cultural communities,
- it reduces opportunities for informal learning and digital participation which are already limited for this cohort due to barriers like language, literacy and unfamiliarity with systems,
- it does not address core harms such as racism and cyberbullying, nor provide support to seek help about forms of harassment experienced online (which will continue via chat applications which are not banned), and
- it may delay digital literacy development, making it harder for young people to safely navigate online spaces and challenge racism online once they regain access.

What is needed?

While young people are deeply concerned about racism on social media, the majority do not think a blanket ban is the solution. Instead, they call for:

- stronger moderation and filtering of content, with government and platforms to enforce content and algorithm 'blocks' to reduce exposure to harmful content,
- stricter rules for prohibiting hateful and discriminatory content, and enforcement of these rules by platforms and governments, which should focus on mandating platforms to be safe by design and imposing safety standards rather than enforcing a ban on young people,
- culturally sensitive digital literacy education programs to teach cross-cultural awareness, including anti-racism, and how to report online racism and strategies to protect mental health online, and
- youth-led solutions - young people are the most active on social media and bear the largest burden of racism so are best placed to create solutions.^{lxviii}



Case Study: YOUNG INITIATORS INSTAGRAM

The Young Initiators is a leadership program coordinated by CMY. The program aims to empower multicultural young people as active citizens, and leaders of positive change in their local community. Their Instagram account, @the_young_initiators serves as a public platform to showcase youth-led projects and to share stories of social change and anti-racist content. By using Instagram as a tool to amplify young people's work, celebrate their achievements and raise awareness about anti racism, the account moves from activism to creating a community that young people can engage in.

3. Mental health & addiction

The dual effects of social media on mental health

While social media is often attributed as the cause of Australia's deepening youth mental health crisis, the impact of social media is more complex, particularly for newly arrived and multicultural young people.^{bx} For these cohorts it offers many benefits including connection, information and support.^{bx} While the ban intends to mitigate mental health risks, young people and workers are concerned a ban may unintentionally exacerbate existing mental health concerns by removing a critical lifeline.

Around one third (35%) of multicultural young people and one fifth (21%) of newly arrived young people surveyed reported that the impacts of social media use on mental health and wellbeing were a concern for them. However, most newly arrived young people (70%) and nearly half of multicultural young people (46%) reported that social media has both positive and negative impacts on their lives. Many also reported that they did not believe a ban was going to address the specific concerns they held.

On the positive and negative impacts of social media, multicultural young people shared the following:

 Benefits	 Harms
Allows me to stay in contact with friends and organise things. I can also [send] memes/ videos to friends for a laugh. I can see when events are on and share them to attend.	Sometimes it [exposure to negative content] affect (sic) my self-esteem though but try not to compare as I become more educated.
Often it is calming and a way to relax and reconnect with friends I haven't seen in a long time	Sometimes looking at what everyone has accomplished makes me feel stuck in my life
I can learn about real world news and politics that are going on in the world	It can be upsetting to see some of the disgusting stuff people post (eg. literal gore)
I really like seeing what opportunities and classes are around, what's on, and what businesses are doing.	Seeing what my friends are doing can also make me really sad because I know that life is not all great and sparkling.
I like to have a way to keep up with friends and family.	Don't like that I am very reliant on it for entertainment

Mental health risks of the ban – losing a vital lifeline

Beyond risks, social media can also be a protective factor by connecting multicultural and newly arrived young people, acting as a vital bridge for accessing both community support and mental health services and informal 'third places'. Losing these supports may exacerbate existing service inequities, particularly for multicultural and regional young people.^{bx} This can be further exacerbated for some by a distrust of services and cultural stigma associated with help seeking within some multicultural and newly arrived communities.^{bxii}

Young people with intersectional identities reported that they felt more confident to seek help online for concerns and questions, and to use forums and networks on social media instead of seeking advice in person. Additionally,

some young people reported that they turn to generative AI for mental health advice, underscoring a critical shift in how young people access support and raising concerns about the reliability and oversight of digital tools more broadly.

"Reddit and Tumblr got me through my transition - without the support I received there it would have made my life much harder. Without the YouTubers I watched, I would not have even figured out I was trans, and I would still be dealing with internalised homophobia"

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old



"Restrictions aren't always the answer, supervision is. Keep an eye on the youth, teach us how to be safe. Don't let them have the lack of awareness that I did when I was younger, but also don't give them restrictions that destroy their social lives. Find a better solution."

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

Research shows that after family and friends, the internet is the preferred medium for seeking support for mental health, and advice for young people,^{bxiii} and that digital participation is an important tool for young people

to support their mental health and wellbeing during settlement.^{bxiv} Losing access to this support is likely to have unintended consequences for young people. According to the Australian eSafety Commissioner:

Social media, mental health and youth settlement

While settlement workers anticipate many needs of new arrivals, young people report drawing on social media to find information and additional support for issues and challenges they may feel embarrassed about sharing or have been unable to find elsewhere, including mental health and wellbeing support.

By banning young people from mainstream social media platforms—widely used by services and communities to share information and connect—a ban could lead to engagement in less moderated spaces. These spaces are likely to remain unrestricted, as users can access them without an account, increasing exposure to extremist content and misinformation not overseen by adults.^{bxvi} This is an especially pronounced risk for newly arrived young people who may have limited digital literacy skills to distinguish reliable information from misinformation, which can be heightened in an unfamiliar political context.

What is needed?

If young people are banned from mainstream social media platforms, approaches that support them to seek mental health and wellbeing support offline, or alternative safe online spaces must be established and adopted. These should include tailored approaches for multicultural and newly arrived young people that are focused on:

- intercultural capability, youth participation, trauma informed care, family-centred practice and youth and community engagement, and
- the unique challenges faced by this cohort, including racism, and an emphasis of the importance of self-identity and cultural identity in promoting resilience and wellbeing during settlement.^{bxvii}

Supporters of the ban argue that it will curb mental health risks, such as cyber bullying, body image issues and addictive behaviours.^{xxxiii} While excessive use of social media correlates with heightened anxiety and depression,^{xxxix} broader societal factors also shape youth mental health, and a blanket ban is a blunt policy solution that inadequately addresses the interrelated factors contributing to poor mental health.^{xxx}

Addiction and patterns of usage

Multicultural young people were more likely to worry about addiction (46%) and excessive screentime (61%) than their newly arrived peers (10%) and (20%). For newly arrived young people, the main concern was distraction from daily responsibilities (30%). This difference might reflect how newly arrived young people are using social media more purposefully, with 70% reporting using it for learning and development (vs 23% of multicultural young people), and fewer using it for entertainment (50% vs 76% of multicultural young people) or to pass time (20% vs 69% of multicultural young people).

Differences in usage between these cohorts may also suggest that newly arrived young people might not view their social media use as inherently problematic, as it may align with their goals of learning and adapting, or could relate to their exposure to Australian norms and expectations around digital use.^{xxxvi} However more research is needed to understand this further.

Addiction and algorithms – exacerbating harms

The rise of algorithm driven social media has transformed the way users engage with online content, even in the last decade.^{xxxii} Algorithms use automated software designed to optimise engagement and have been found to promote extreme, polarising and sensationalist material to generate higher interactions with platforms.^{xxxiii}

At the heart of these harms lies a business model driven by data collection and advertising revenue. Platforms are designed to maximise user engagement by exploiting emotional triggers such as outrage, fear and insecurity, rather than to ensure the enjoyment and wellbeing of young people.^{xxxiv} This has resulted in social media users often being fed increasingly one-sided, biased content that has been shown to encourage limited thinking and at its worst, to proliferate hate speech, misinformation, dangerous stereotypes and racism.^{xxxv} As a result, harmful content is not only amplified but also entrenched through echo chambers, which limits exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforce users' existing views.^{xxxvi}

On their experiences with algorithms on social media, young people shared:



"Scrolling on social media is already very time consuming and energy draining for my friends but as neurodivergent person, I find myself particularly susceptible to feeling locked into scrolling, which not only makes me feel bad but also takes a lot of time away from things I want to enjoy."

– multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

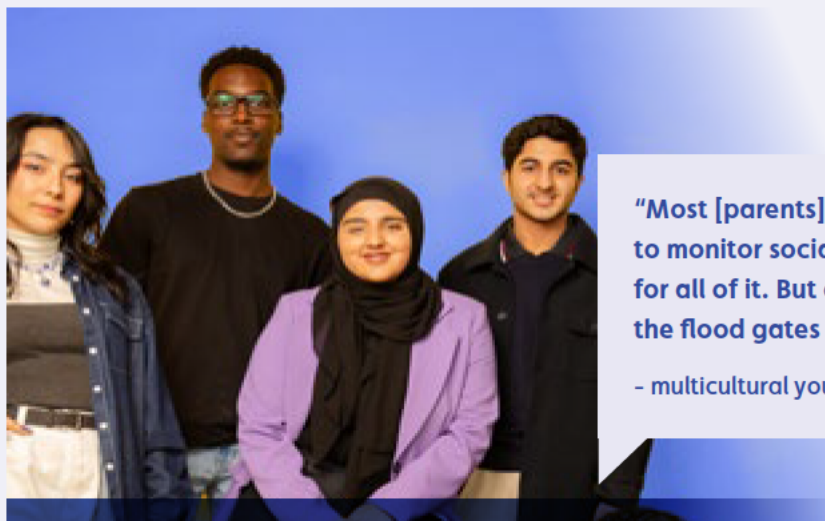
"I think there should be limitations to what can appear on people's social media not that they should have no access or permission from parents. It is the internet that should be limited and impacted not the young people who use it."

– multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old



Algorithm: machine learning-driven recommender systems that personalise and prioritise content based on user data—such as demographics, search history, and behaviour—to maximise engagement and reach.

From the Joint Select Committee on Social Media and Australian Society, Social Media: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – Final Report.



"Most [parents] probably wouldn't have a clue as to how to monitor social media. [Put it into the] too hard basket for all of it. But once you given them a phone you open the flood gates and don't know how to stop it."

- multicultural young person, 18 – 24 years old

Social media 'addiction' and youth settlement

The engagement driven design of social media platforms can expose young people to harmful content, which can undermine belonging and isolate them. This isolation can heighten vulnerability to misinformation and even contribute to online radicalisation by driving young people to less regulated and potentially more harmful spaces.^{xxxvii} This can be more pronounced for newly arrived young people who have less social capital and fewer support networks.

Rather than imposing blanket restrictions, strategies that foster media literacy and promote safe, meaningful engagement with parents and young people would better support positive digital participation. Ensuring strategies are culturally responsive and tailored to the needs of different cohorts of young people will make them accessible.

What is needed?

To address negative impact of technocentric factors, like algorithms and addictive technologies, platforms must be regulated to make them 'safe by design'. Platforms must be ordered to restrict features like infinite scrolling, and have mandatory safety features, such as algorithm transparency, giving users more oversight of the role of algorithms and control over the content they see.^{xxxviii}

The Australian Privacy Commissioner has argued that platforms can effectively regulate for greater user safety. This was evident in the reported dramatic shifts in user experience on X (formerly Twitter) following Elon Musk's 2022 acquisition of the platform. After cutting 80% of the platform's safety engineering staff, X reportedly became a less safe space for users with response times to hateful messages slowing by 20%.^{xxxix} However, there were also market repercussions to such decisions, with X's advertising revenue decreasing by more than 45% following Musk's acquisition. This suggests that greater regulation of platform actions related to online safety may also benefit platforms and is something the government should consider when weighing the costs and benefits of increased regulation of social media platforms.^x

As part of the online safety regulatory framework, the Australian Government must ensure that social media platforms introduce measures that allow users control over what content they see by having the ability to alter, reset or turn off their personal algorithms. This was proposed in the Digital Duty of Care Bill 2024 that failed to pass parliament in 2024; however a digital duty of care has been flagged as a possible future measure by the current government.^{xi}

Given the ongoing lack of enforceability for 'global tech giants', many who operate beyond Australia's jurisdiction, there is a critical need for international collaboration. Without coordinated global standards and enforcement mechanisms, platforms can bypass their obligations.^{xii} Australia's commitment to international regulatory frameworks and multilateral pressure, through support for the UN Global Digital Compact, are critical to holding big companies accountable and ensuring that safety standards are upheld.^{xiii}



Case Study: RESTRICTING ALGORITHMS IN AMERICA^{xclv}

In America, various states (e.g. Connecticut) have adopted regulations that are focused on making the products safer through design of the platform itself rather than limiting individual user behaviour. These include restrictions on algorithms for users under 18 (without parental consent) which requires platforms to display content chronologically for minors, rather than promoting content based on what the algorithm determines is likely to keep the user on the platform. Regulations provide enforcement powers to the State Attorney General, including the ability to issue fines to platforms for non-compliance.

These laws are among the strongest in the world for regulating addictive platform design and protecting young users while still supporting young people's access to online communities and freedom of expression.

However, critics have raised concerns about the enforceability of the legislation and how platforms will verify ages and apply parental controls effectively, similar to what has been raised in Australia. However, this emerging legislation illustrates alternatives to a blanket ban by addressing addictive algorithms through regulation and system design interventions to enhance online safety for children and young people.

4. Challenges and opportunities for family engagement

"Both parents might be working multiple jobs ... or they might not use social media themselves ... It's the blind leading the blind."

– parent of multicultural young person/people

Barriers to family engagement

Multicultural and newly arrived families face multiple, intersecting barriers to engaging with and supervising young people's social media use. The challenges posed by platforms not prioritising safety are often compounded for families with lower levels of English proficiency and/or digital literacy who can face barriers to access the necessary resources and supports to understand and successfully navigate children's and young people's digital participation. Financial stress and poor digital access can also exacerbate barriers for multicultural and newly arrived families. Additionally, due to juggling the requirements and stresses of settlement, many newly arrived parents lack the time and resources to provide necessary oversight and support for their children and young people online. This extends to their capacity to enforce a social media ban once enacted.

These findings are supported by a 2023 study into parental perception of young peoples' online behaviour in multicultural communities in Australia, which found that "parents from multicultural societies are less equipped to deal with cyber threats that their children face and are ill-equipped to monitor and mitigate the risks posed."^{xcv} This difficulty is compounded by the 'digital divide'

between generations—a distinct gap in access, skills, and confidence in using digital technologies—that is more pronounced for multicultural and newly arrived young people and their parents or carers compared to the broader population.^{xvii} This was demonstrated in the survey, with many young people reporting limited parental engagement in their social media use. Fifty percent of newly arrived young people and 61% of multicultural young people reported never or rarely discussing concerns about social media with their families. Similarly, 69% of newly arrived young people and 54% of multicultural young people reported having no restrictions on their use.

Protective but limited strategies

Some multicultural families reportedly take protective actions to increase their children's and young people's safety online, such as increased monitoring when aware of issues or advising children to block users. Where adult supervision of social media existed, it was minimal, such as 'friending' children on platforms or setting basic screen time limits. These strategies were often simple and reactive, rarely supported by open conversations or efforts to build long-term digital literacy skills to help children and young people navigate the online world safely.

"One time a guy was harassing me online, so I went to my parents to tell them my concerns ... and they helped me out by comforting me and telling me to block them."

– multicultural young person, 17 years old.

Some multicultural families reported having more active involvement and greater oversight over their children's and young people's social media use. However, all parents reported feeling ill-equipped to navigate the digital worlds their children inhabit. Research suggests that parents and carers from collectivist cultures are more likely to use restrictions rather than mediation to manage their children's online safety and internet use.^{xvii} However, restrictive approaches alone are unlikely to equip young people with the skills needed to navigate online challenges independently and may prove unhelpful at preventing harms in the longer term. Once young people are old enough to access social media, they may lack the skills and experience to do so safely.

"The content is out of my control, and I am worried about it, but this is manageable [screen time limits]... I'm worried about the content, not the screen time. I manage that."

– parent of multicultural young person/people

While some parents expressed confidence about their ability to support their children online, this was often contingent on access to practical and culturally tailored support, including in-language training and workshops.

"If you were to ask me what I thought would be sufficient, I would probably say some sort of module for parents in schools, or a one pager with tips of healthy social media use, and examples of this and unhealthy use."

– parent of multicultural young person/people

"Parents hand over their device because they don't have literacy about the digital world... they might buy [their kids] a digital device because their kids are demanding it, but they have no idea what it means to hand a child a device. They need digital literacy [programs] to give them some skills on how to monitor, and what it means to give a child an iphone/ipad. Parents need more understanding, and digital literacy skills on that."

– parent of multicultural young person/people

Parents are wanting to engage in their children's digital worlds, and they play a more active role in their children's lives online but they must be given support and resources

to manage the dangers and risks associated with social media and tools to get involved in the management of this.

"Yes, parents can support their kids. They are having to navigate all social relationships, and social media is just another one that you have to navigate and adjust to."

– parent of multicultural young person/people

Knowledge gaps and consequences

While families reported being aware of common risks, such as exposure to harmful content and cyberbullying, other risks like image-based abuse, radicalisation, gambling or AI-related threats were rarely discussed, reflecting a potential knowledge gap requiring further research.

Gaps in families' knowledge and understanding of young people's online experiences meant that young people reported turning to peers, siblings, or school for guidance regarding their social media use and any concerns they had. While this was reported as helpful, it may not provide the comprehensive support young people need to address serious online risks and could increase vulnerability, especially for those who are newly arrived. This highlights the need to strengthen intergenerational dialogue and to equip families with digital literacy and the tools needed to support their young peoples' safe digital participation.^{xviii}

"Schools obviously have a role to play in this education; they need to be hiring younger people and teachers who are not anti-internet and actually will educate kids instead of fear monger."

– young person, 18 – 24 years old.

Families were largely supportive of external interventions for managing social media use, including the social media ban. For families, this stemmed from feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of online risks and the lack of tools to respond effectively.

Research suggests many first-generation and newly arrived parents and carers are less likely to know where to seek digital support beyond schools, and are less equipped to handle the risks their children encounter online due to a lack of culturally appropriate resources and unfamiliarity with Australian systems.^{xix} Research with multicultural parents in 2023 found that 80% of respondents were not aware of any government policies or initiatives regarding online protection of young people,

highlighting a real disconnect between the resources and tools available and what is used by multicultural families.^c In contrast, research by the eSafety Commissioner found that about half of parents they surveyed felt confident to deal with cyberbullying

and knew where to get help in relation to their child's online safety.^d This suggests there is a gap between knowledge of multicultural parents and the general population.

Social media, parenting and youth settlement

While digital and social media can act as an important tool for newly arrived and multicultural young people to bridge barriers and connect with services, education, and community networks during settlement and beyond, it can also create intergenerational tensions. This occurs when barriers to digital participation for multicultural and newly arrived families compound with barriers to accessing resources and supports impacting their capacity to support their children and young people to manage online risks. This can lead to overcompensation through either permissive or restrictive parenting approaches to managing online activity and/or avoidance or secretive behaviour among young people. This can drive online activity underground, exacerbate feelings of misunderstanding about use, and potentially increase young people's exposure to harm.^e A ban alone will not equip families with the knowledge they need to support their children and young people to safely navigate online spaces, particularly those that are not subject to the ban or once they turn 16 years old.

What is needed?

To address these challenges, a social media ban must be complemented with other interventions, such as comprehensive and culturally tailored digital literacy programs for multicultural and newly arrived parents. These could stand alone or be embedded within existing parenting courses for newly arrived and multicultural communities. These programs should focus on technical skills, as well as tools to foster open dialogue between parents and children about online participation, addressing issues that have been identified as key concerns for young people and adults alike. Community informed and community led organisations and movements should be involved in the design and delivery of these programs, to ensure skills and knowledge gaps are targeted effectively, and to leverage existing networks and trusted relationships for fostering engagement.



Families: An inclusive term that encompasses parents, carers, guardians, kin, and families of choice, recognising the diverse relationships and support networks that contribute to the care and wellbeing of children and young people.

5. Implementation: Key considerations for Newly Arrived Young People

While the intention behind the social media ban is to respond to parent concerns and protect young people, there are likely to be broader implications for young people's digital inclusion, mental health, and access to information – all factors critical to successful settlement for newly arrived young people. Findings suggest a ban could have disproportionately negative impacts for newly arrived young people, and implementation must be preceded by further consultation and research into strategies and tools to mitigate likely risks for this cohort, including:

Impact on Digital Inclusion and Digital Literacy

Digital participation is recognised as critical to full and equal participation in society and social media is a vital tool in the digital integration of newly arrived young people settling in Australia, facilitating access to information, services, and networks. The daily use of social media by young people also develops their digital literacy as they navigate online worlds, evaluate information and manage their privacy. It also encourages critical thinking through creation and interaction with diverse content. Having a digitally literate generation of young Australians who can tell fact from fiction, navigate digital spaces safely, and build meaningful connections, protects and safeguards democracy while a blanket ban on access is likely to result in less opportunities for young people, especially those who are more newly arrived, to build these essential skills.^{ciii}

Access to Information

Social media platforms are key methods through which young people access information relating to settlement and life in Australia. Settlement organisations, like most services and groups in Australia, rely on social media platforms to disseminate information and connect with young people. The ban raises significant concerns about how services will reach young people once they lose access to social media. Social media often translates

information that is accessible on other interfaces, like government websites, into more accessible or engaging formats for their audiences. This sometimes gives better exposure to intended audiences than traditional sources. A good example is the recent increase in use of multicultural and youth-facing organisations' social media platforms to promote government public health messaging – such as the recent national social media campaign about vaping information targeting multicultural youth.^{civ} Once young people are removed from platforms, alternative communication strategies must be developed to ensure continued access to vital information.

Support for Regaining Access to Social Media

Once young people are able to access social media at the age of 16, they may lack the digital literacy and analytical skills required to navigate platforms safely. The ban does not address the issue of building the skills and knowledge of newly arrived and multicultural young people and families to safely navigate social media and engage online. Programs to support this transition and equip multicultural young people and families with skills to use social media safely will be necessary.

Emerging Challenges

Privacy remains an ongoing concern despite, and for some, because of the ban. A ban requires a significant amount of data to be collected, especially for age verification technology, raising concerns about data collection practices with minors and data security risks, such as identity theft, fraud, and unsolicited marketing. The ban does not address platform regulation issues and safety concerns, especially in regards to data security. Without meaningfully regulating platforms, and demanding stronger safety measures, existing risks and concerns are likely to grow.

Conclusion

Australia's decision to legislate a social media ban for under 16-year-olds represents a significant intervention in the digital lives of young people. While the policy is driven by legitimate concerns, this research highlights that a blanket ban is unlikely to address the nuanced challenges facing multicultural and newly arrived young people, and risks creating additional barriers to their participation and settlement without further intervention.

The findings underscore a need for a more balanced approach that prioritises robust digital safety measures without sacrificing young people's rights to access information. Instead of restricting access, there is an urgent need to do more to ameliorate the lack of action from technology giants to ensure platforms are 'safe by design', for all of us.^{iv} As Australia moves forward

to implement this legislation enforcing the ban, it is essential for governments and organisations to invest in consultation and research to inform inclusive, evidence-based strategies that ensure safe and equitable digital participation for all young people. A comprehensive approach to implementing the ban will need to consider the particular needs of this cohort of young people and their supporters. This should include education, community engagement and holistic support systems to better protect and serve the needs of diverse multicultural young people. With greater content moderation, platforms being designed to be safe, and tailored digital literacy programs. Without this, the ban is unlikely to achieve its aim to make safer digital spaces for young Australians.





Annexure 1: Methodology

This research adopted a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative consultations and scan of relevant literature.

However, research highlights that multicultural and newly arrived young people are not a homogenous group, and many newly arrived young people and those experiencing higher levels of financial stress face barriers to digital access that impact upon their use.^{cvii} As such, it is necessary to recognise that needs will be shaped by each young person's unique perspective and identity, and to consider the role of intersectionality in shaping experiences.

Literature Review

Australian and international literature was reviewed to construct a clear picture of the existing understanding about the use, benefits and risks of social media in relation to multicultural and newly arrived young people. This scan reiterated the centrality of social media for connection, identity and civic participation for young people. Despite these benefits the literature also identified the risks of social media, with studies documenting the adverse impacts on young people, however there was little evidence about the nuanced experiences of this particular cohort. The literature has been used to inform the discussion and findings within this paper.

Data Collection

In November 2024, CMY conducted targeted surveys of multicultural young people to explore social media usage and perceptions of the proposed ban. Additional insights were gathered through interviews and focus groups with CMY staff who were also parents, as well as a co-ordinator of a parent group. Preliminary findings were published in November 2024.^{cviii}

There were a total of 13 responses analysed from the survey with multicultural young people. A total of 14 responses were received, but one respondent was over 25 years old and this response was excluded. Of the remaining 13 respondents, the median average age was 17 years old. Majority of the respondents were woman or female identifying ($n = 2$). Three respondents identified as man or male, and two respondents identified as non-binary. Majority of respondents spoke English at home ($n = 9$) and over a third spoke a language other than English at home ($n = 4$). The respondents were from a variety of geographic locations, with representation from both metropolitan and regional Victoria.

From January to March 2025, a survey with newly arrived young people was conducted. To facilitate participation, the author attended a homework club and an English language school to support students to complete the survey, and documented relevant discussions.

A total of 14 responses were received for the survey of newly arrived young people. Four respondents were over 25 years old and these responses were excluded, analysis was conducted on the remaining 10 responses. A majority of respondents were in the age bracket 18 – 24 years old ($n = 9$), and one respondent was 15 years old. A majority



of respondents had arrived in Australia in the last 12 months ($n=8$), and one respondent had arrived in 2022 and one pre-2016. The majority of respondents identified as man or male ($n=6$) and three identified as woman or female ($n=3$), one identified as non-binary. We did not ask respondents additional demographic questions so as to make the survey more accessible for this cohort.

All surveys were promoted through CMY's social media channels. The survey questions were developed from the Victorian Government's 'Engage' Survey about the proposed changes to social media age limits.^{cviii}

A survey for parents was conducted in November 2024, however limited responses ($n=1$) required adoption of alternative methods for understanding parent perspectives. Consultations were conducted with parents and those who work with them between November 2024 and May 2025. A total of seven multicultural youth and settlement workers were consulted, this included three who were parents from multicultural backgrounds with children under 16 years of age, all other participants were actively working with young people in the family context and/or in parenting programs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using the original survey questions as a guide, interviews were recorded and transcribed to support analysis for key themes.

All participants provided informed consent, and for those under 16, parental consent was obtained. Data was analysed using thematic analysis, with key themes identified collaboratively by the research team.

Qualitative data from consultations and surveys informed the use of direct quotes in this paper, while survey

responses underpin the analysis presented. In June 2025, the author presented the research findings and recommendations to the Victorian Multicultural Youth Alliance (VMYA), seeking validation from settlement sector representatives regarding the consistency of these findings with sector experience. Their feedback has helped to shape the recommendations.

Limitations

Reflecting on the findings, it is important to note that participants represent a small sample size, and the young people we spoke to are not representative of all young people from refugee and migrant or newly arrived backgrounds. As such these findings can be indicative only.

There are also limited quotes from newly arrived young people due to the nature of how the survey was conducted, and English language barriers. As such, the report heavily relies on quotes from multicultural young people.

Further, majority of newly arrived respondents were 18 -24 years old, and as such the age ban will not affect them, and their perspectives likely reflect this.

Annexure 2: Findings

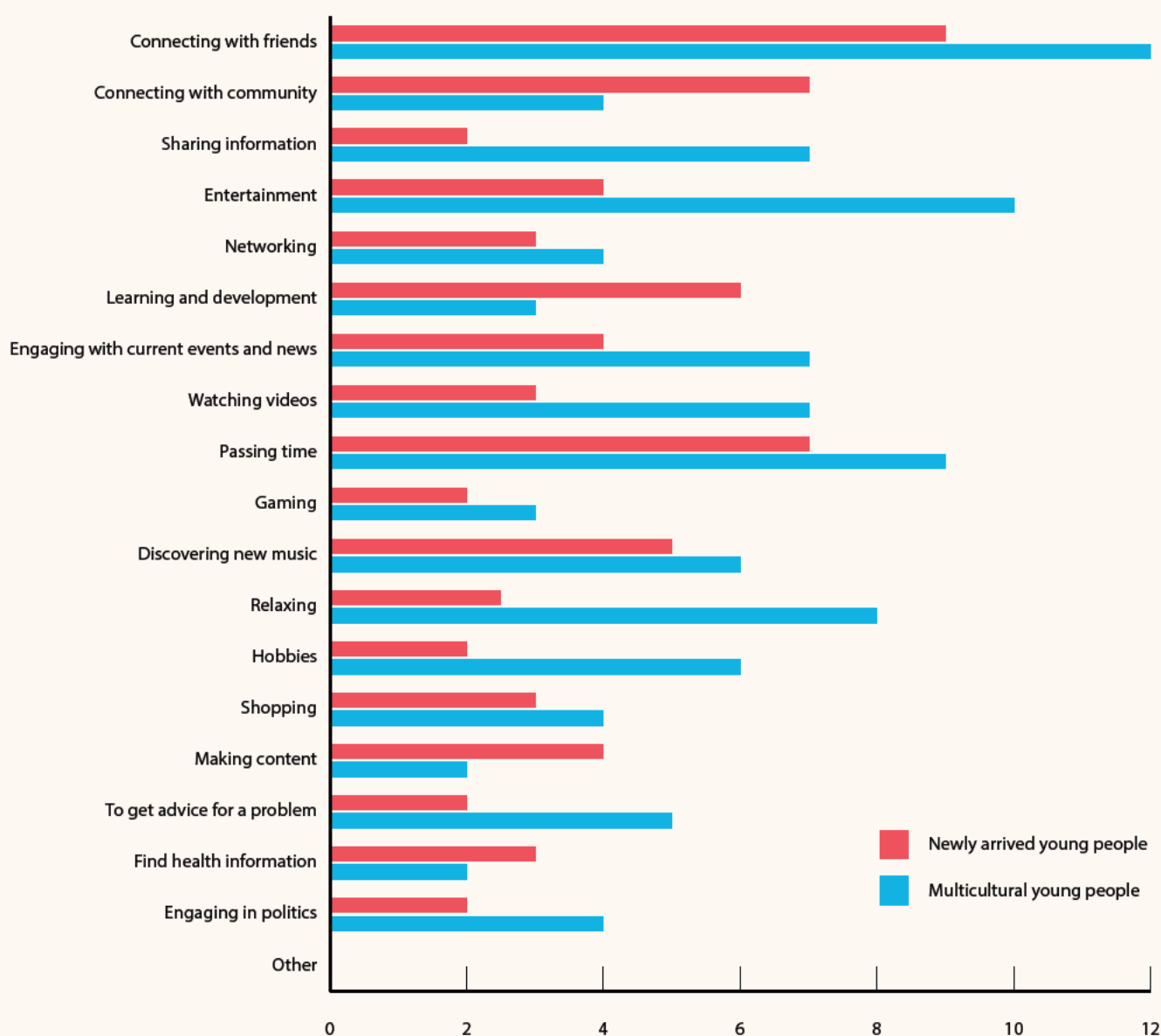
We conducted a mixed methods approach to collecting data. This included administering two surveys, one with multicultural young people (MYP) (n=13), and one with newly arrived young people (NAYP) (n=10) to understand their perspectives of the Social Media Ban. This was complimented by consultations with both parents/carers and workers (n=7). Consultation notes and open text survey responses have been included as deidentified quotes to contextualise survey findings and offer further insight to survey responses.^{dx}

How young people use social media

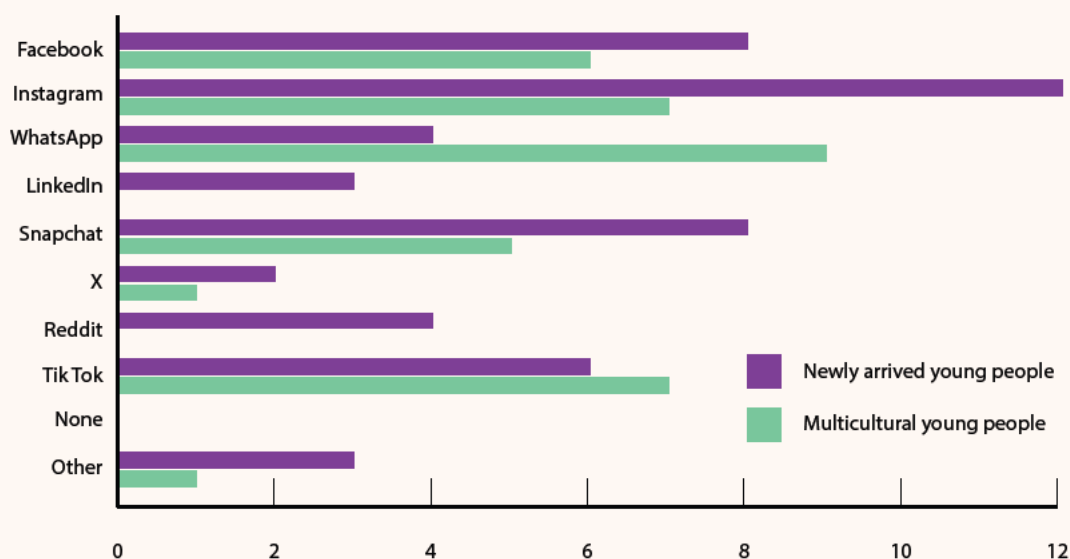
Both newly arrived young people (NAYP) and multicultural young people (MYP) predominantly used the same platforms, with MYP using some additional platforms. The most popular platforms for both cohorts were Facebook and Instagram, followed by TikTok and Snapchat. However, MYP were more likely to use additional platforms including LinkedIn and Reddit.

NAYP used social media for varied purposes, with majority of respondents noting they used it to connect with friends (90%, n = 9), connect with community (70%, n = 7), watch videos (70%, n = 7), and for learning and development (60%, n = 6). This cohort also noted they used social media platforms to obtain advice on a problem, to find health information, for self-expression, and to learn about news and current events. MYP however, most commonly used social media to connect with friends (92%, n = 12) and for entertainment (77%, n = 10) and were more likely to use it for engaging in politics (30%, n = 4) and to get advice on a problem (38%, n = 5) than NAYP.

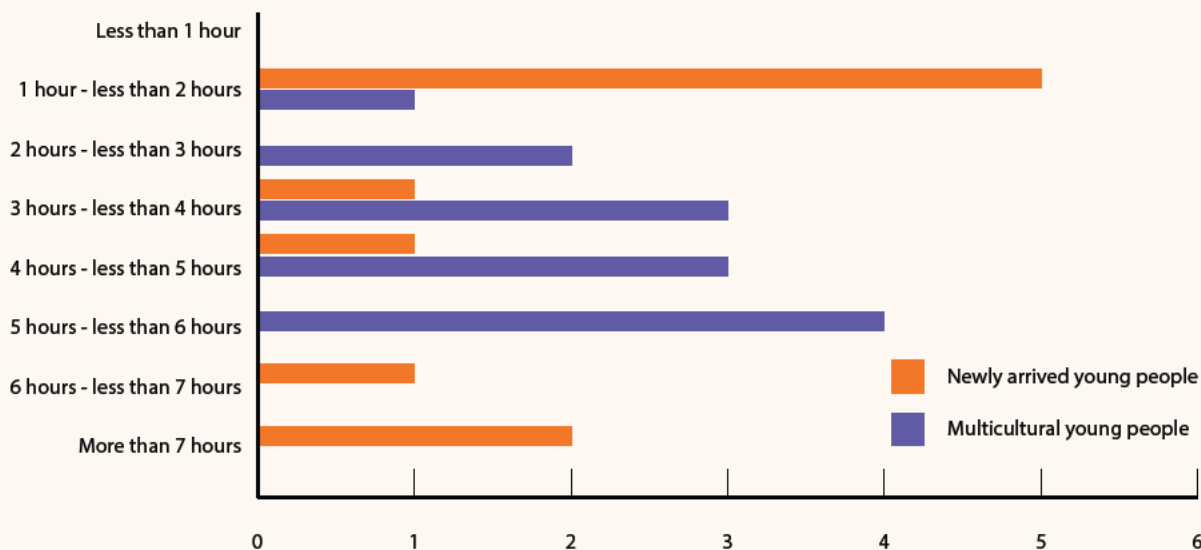
Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural young people reporting what they use social media for



Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural young people reporting the platforms they use

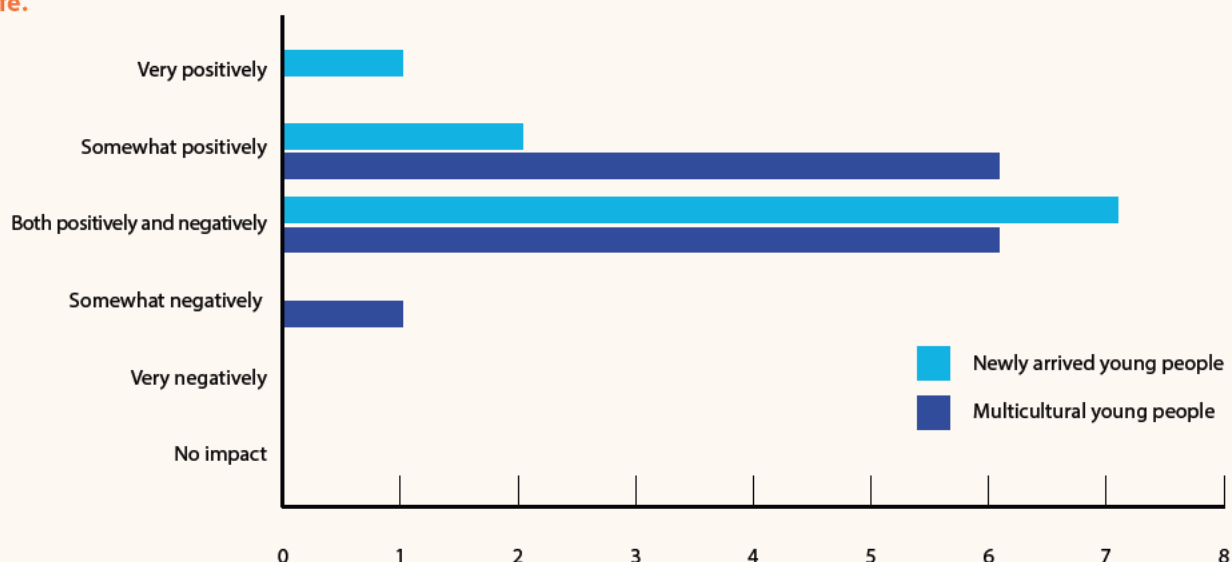


Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting time spent on social media daily.



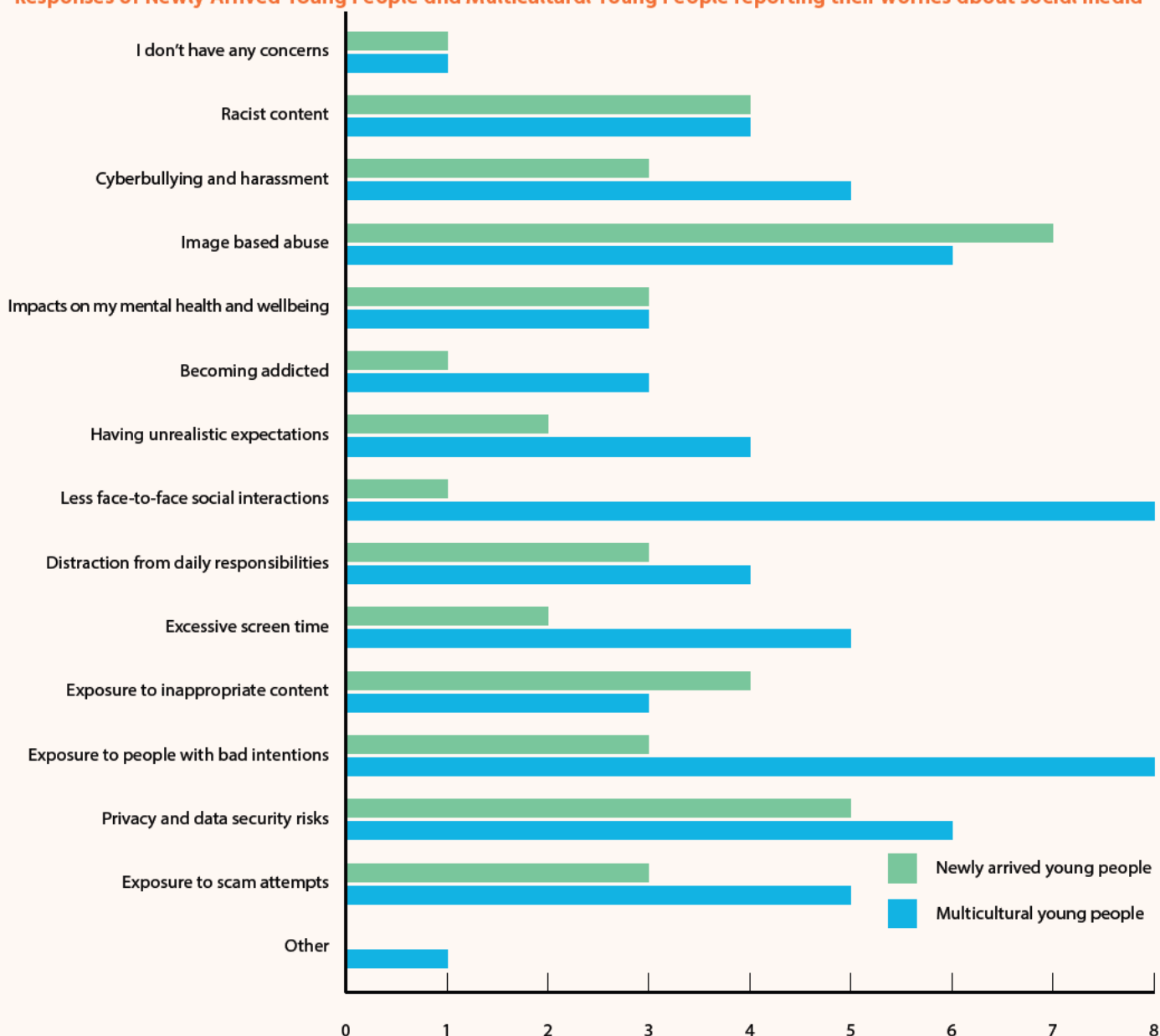
Time spent on social media varied greatly among young people. Half of the NAYP reported spending 1-2 hours daily on social media (50%, n = 5), followed by a quarter who reported they spend more than 7 hours daily on social media (20%, n = 2). This contrasted with MYP who reported spending more time on social media overall, with most spending 4 hours (23%, n = 3) and only one young person spending 1-2 hours (8%).

Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting the impact of social media on their life.



Most NAYP (70%, n = 7) and MYP (46%, n = 6) reported that social media impacted their lives both positively and negatively. However, overall, both cohorts were more likely to consider social media as being more positive than negative.

Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting their worries about social media



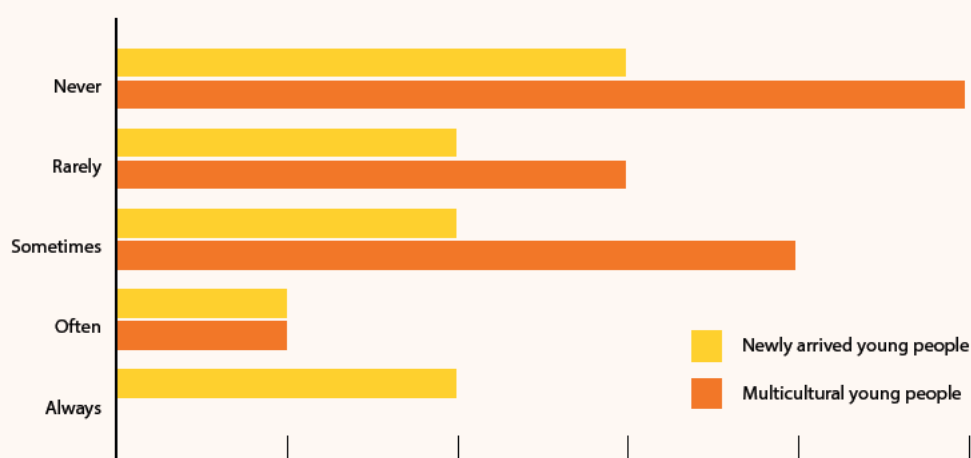
What are young people worried about on social media?

NAYP and MYP shared core concerns about social media, identifying privacy, exposure to inappropriate content and racist content and the impact of social media on their mental health as significant worries. However, MYP were also concerned about excessive screen time and becoming addicted to social media. In contrast, NAYP were more likely to be concerned about exposure to people with bad intentions and social media as a distraction from daily responsibilities. Looking at the data, key concerns of MYP relate to the addictive nature of platforms, whereas NAYP were more concerned about interpersonal risks.

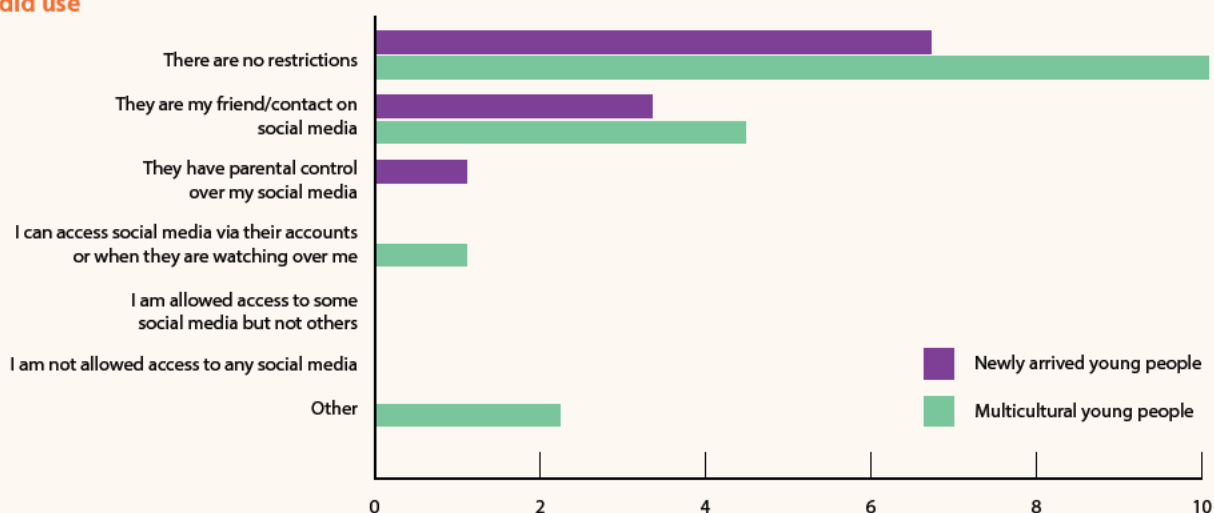
How do young people engage with parents and carers about their social media use?

Both NAYP and MYP reported limited engagement from with their parents/carers in their social media use. 50% of NAYP (n = 5) and 61% of MYP (n = 8) reported rarely or never speaking to their parents/carers about social media (Fig. 11 & 12) and most reported that they had few or no restrictions on their use imposed by parents/carers (Fig. 13 & 14). This may be attributable to the fact that majority of respondents were over 16 years old. However, survey respondents who were under 16 years old also reported that they rarely spoke to parents/carers about their social media use.

Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting the frequency they speak to parents/carers about social media



Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting how their parents manage their social media use

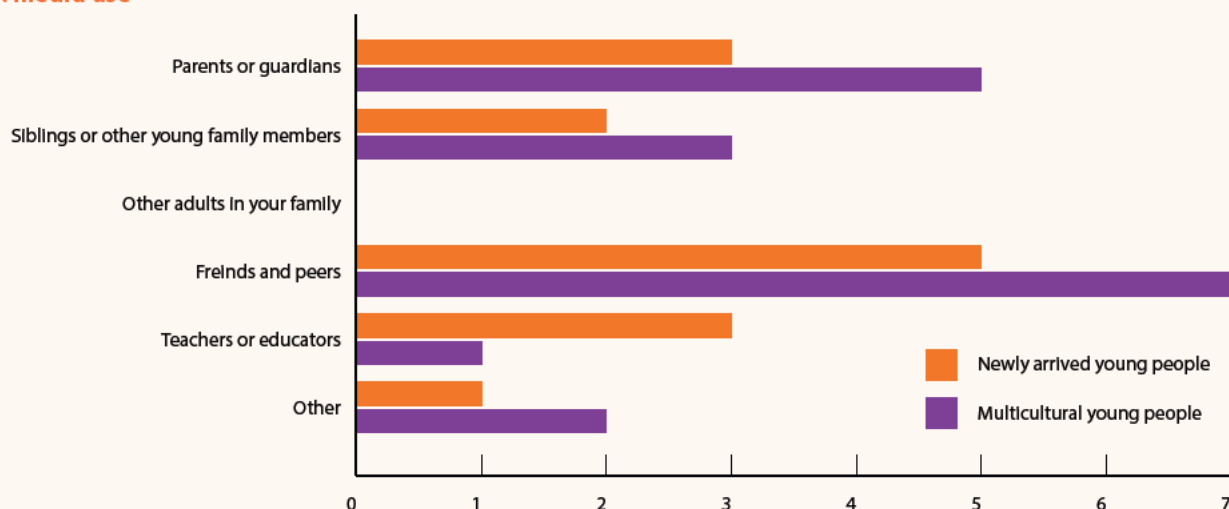


Parental management of young peoples' social media, where it did occur, was often limited to being a contact on platforms (e.g. a Facebook friend) or setting basic limits (such as restrictions on screen time or time limits on devices). NAYP were more likely to describe familial attitudes as 'hands off' compared to MYP who reported a higher prevalence of their parents/carers engaging in some form of active oversight.

Of their social media use, parents/carers of multicultural young people shared that they sometimes felt ill-equipped to support their children's digital needs and required greater education and support themselves.

In conversations and interviews with young people both MYP and NAYP cohorts reported relying on themselves, friends or siblings for advice and support alongside of their parents.

Responses of Newly Arrived Young People and Multicultural Young People reporting who they speak to about their social media use



What do people think about the social media ban?

The following analyses open text survey responses from all cohorts to the question 'what are your thoughts on the proposed Social Media Ban'.

Multicultural parents expressed divided views on a social media ban for young people. Many welcomed the ban, citing difficulty managing their children's online use as a key reason. Others felt capable to support safe use but said they lacked the proper tools and resources to do this, and a ban had little effect on this.

Multicultural young people, however, largely opposed the ban, advocating for platform-level content controls rather than restricting access.

Newly arrived young people were more supportive of the ban but often confused it with a broader phone ban, indicating possible limited understanding of the distinction.

When asked 'what would young people prefer?', survey respondents suggested: 'tailored feeds', 'empowering education', 'real world skills', 'customisable platforms', and 'content moderation'.



Endnotes

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- 'What if anything, worries you about social media'
- 'How do your parents/carers engage with or manage your social media use?'
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MYAN Youth Engagement Strategy



Introduction

This paper outlines MYAN's Youth Engagement Strategy, which provides a framework for working alongside young people and support them to actively participate in civic life, influence policy, and strengthen their leadership. It sets out MYAN's approach to meaningful participation, guided by the voices of young people, and highlights the structures, goals, and commitments that underpin this work.

The multicultural young people we work with are diverse and nuanced, each carrying complex identities and lived experiences that shape the way they contribute and are positioned in relation to their communities.

Young people with refugee and migrant backgrounds, many of whom were born or raised in Australia and balance family cultural traditions with the broader Australian culture. They may span 1st, 2nd or 3rd plus generation of young Australians. They often create a third culture and act as cultural bridges, demonstrating resilience and strong leadership in advocating for inclusion, social justice, and opportunities for their peers.

International students who bring global perspectives, skills, and cultural knowledge. While they face challenges such as social isolation, navigating systems, and barriers to employment, they are motivated, resourceful, and deeply motivated. Their experiences add richness and diversity to conversations around belonging and identity.

Newly arrived refugees and migrants who are in the early stages of settlement. They may face significant challenges around language, education, housing, and employment, adapting to a new culture and environment, yet they bring remarkable resilience, determination, and hope. Their contributions highlight both the struggles and the possibilities of starting anew.

Across all three groups, these young people are not defined by a single narrative. Their diversity and nuance remind us that they are more than their migration stories, they are leaders, learners, and active contributors to Australia's multicultural communities.



About MYAN's Youth Engagement Strategy

The Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) understands the importance of working in partnership with young people, upholding their voices and facilitating their engagement with policy and advocacy that affects them. Through the implementation of MYAN's Youth Engagement Strategy (the Strategy), young people will continue to play a critical role in shaping the first focus area of MYAN's 2024-2026 strategic plan, "Uplift Young People: Enable Young People's Participation in Civic Society and Provide Capability Development for Young People".

MYAN's strategy reinforces meaningful youth participation as an end in itself. It also supports our efforts to advance evidence-based policy and programming, drive transformative advocacy, and build strong partnerships locally and globally.

MYAN's 2024 -25 Youth Advisory Group (YAG) played a key role in developing this strategy. They provided invaluable insights, advice and expertise on all aspects covered in this strategy:

1. The Terms of Engagement

Activator

Advisor

Ambassador

2. Pillars of Youth Empowerment

Education

Participation

Inclusion

3. The MYAN alumni network.



1. Terms of Engagement

This Strategy outlines the different ways young people engage with MYAN – as Activators, Advisors, and Ambassador - and offers direct guidance from young people on how best to engage with them in meaningful and relevant ways. MYAN aims to create an environment where young people can draw on their strengths, pursue their aspirations, and expand their impact within their communities and beyond.

Across all engagement, MYAN’s commitments to the young person are:

Informed consent:

We will provide clear and relevant information about each opportunity or activity, ensuring that the scope, purpose, and intent are fully understood. Young people will be supported to set their own boundaries and are always free to withdraw if they choose.

Briefing & Guidance:

We will offer the necessary preparation and support tailored to the nature of the activity, allowing for clarifying questions. MYAN will also make accommodations to the best of our abilities to ensure the engagement opportunity is inclusive and accessible.

Closing the loop:

We will follow up with debriefs and feedback opportunities, keep young people informed of any outcomes or impacts of their involvement, and show genuine appreciation for their contribution.

1.1 Activator

Young people who engage with MYAN in an ad-hoc manner for opportunities that are often consultative and require lived experience. These young people are supported by MYAN to platform their voice and contribute to discourse around key issues for young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Potential Activities

- Surveys
- Focus Groups
- Consultations
- Case studies
- Media opportunities

YP R&R/Expectations

- Lived experience of a particular topic.
- A willingness & interest to provide insights on topic of experience.

Remuneration

Voluntary capacity but may vary in remuneration depending on the nature of engagement with a particular

Recruitment

Activators may be identified through MYAN’s state and territory partners, other existing networks or through open expression of interest and recruitment.

1.2 Advisor

Young people who are formally onboarded at MYAN in a volunteer or delegate capacity through an agreement or in an advisory capacity through mutually agreed Terms of Reference (ToR) with MYAN. Their engagement is structured with regular scheduled meetings, clearly defined roles and responsibilities within a term. They are emerging leaders who participate in advocacy and programming initiatives and exhibit strong leadership and topic-specific knowledge of national and community issues. MYAN is committed to the ongoing professional development and empowerment of these young people.

Potential Activities

Thematic or project specific, as outlined in the agreement or ToR, examples include:

- Roundtables
- Meetings
- Media

YP R&R/Expectations

- Lived experience and expertise of a particular topic..
- A willingness & interest to provide insights and potential solutions on topic of experience.
- Adherence to signed agreement or ToR and Code of Conduct.

Remuneration

They act in a voluntary capacity but may receive honorariums as outlined in their agreement or ToR.

Recruitment

Advisors may be identified through MYAN's state and territory partners, other existing networks or through open expression of interest and recruitment.

1.3 Ambassador

A young person or young adult that has previously been formally engaged with MYAN through various programs and advisory bodies. They are onboarded at MYAN for a specified term in an Ambassador capacity through a mutually agreed Terms of Reference (ToR) with MYAN. Due to their expertise and experience in advocacy, this young person has a wide network and community, power and skills to influence positive change. They are involved in high-level policy discussions and can act as a peer mentor for other emerging young leaders. MYAN may engage with them based on their specific expertise and skill set for strategic advocacy activities.

Potential Activities

Thematic based on the Ambassadors skillset or area of expertise, as outlined in the agreement ToR and may include:

- National Policy Alliance related activities
- Panel speaking
- Roundtables
- High level meetings
- Media

YP R&R/Expectations

- Lived experience and advocacy expertise in a particular topic.
- An understanding of the current discourse or advocacy landscape in relation to their topic of expertise.
- A willingness & interest to be involved in MYAN's advocacy and policy activities in an ad-hoc capacity.
- Adherence to signed ToR and alignment with MYAN values and strategic goals.

Remuneration

They act in a voluntary capacity but receive honorariums depending on the nature and level of engagement and as outlined in their ToR.

Recruitment

Ambassadors are identified for engagement on particular topics through our networks, and alumni based on their interest, expertise and skillset known to MYAN.

2. Pillars of Youth Empowerment

At MYAN, engaging with young people means meeting them where they are, valuing and promoting their contributions, and providing skilling and personal and professional development opportunities. Empowerment involves creating inclusive environments that respond to their feedback and contributions, motivating young people to exercise their agency, and building their capability to challenge themselves, grow as leaders, and become strong advocates. The engagement and empowerment of young people also means they can influence MYAN's agenda, share feedback, and advise on how we can continually improve our efforts to engage with youth. Through this support, they are equipped to drive systemic advocacy and act as effective agents of change.

2.1 Education

Education is about the national access of individuals to knowledge, resources, and opportunities. As stated in the UNHCR article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, education involves *"the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin."*

At MYAN, education means providing young people with opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to lead healthy, safe, and fulfilling lives. Education is also about supporting young people to develop the practical skills and confidence to advocate for themselves and their communities and to build and exercise a strong sense of agency over their own lives. All educational and training initiatives with and for young people are underpinned by the principles of the [National Youth Settlement Framework](#) and delivered across both formal and informal settings.

Guiding principles outlined by young people for Youth Education at MYAN:

Building the capacity of young people to be powerful and strategic communicators which includes -

1. Media training to ensure young people are confident, and knowledgeable when speaking to media representing MYAN.
2. Public speaking to build the skills and impact of the advocacy young people can do on panels, keynotes, roundtables and presentations.
3. Storytelling to incorporate lived experience powerfully and safely.
4. Thematic or topic-based training to empower young people with the latest knowledge, best practice and discourse to ensure their advocacy is evidence based.

Learning through collaborations with experts, mentors and peers, including -

1. Trailblazers (other established young leaders) of similar backgrounds and experiences.
2. Community leaders with deep ties and understanding of their community needs.
3. Academic experts who are youth friendly and who use their expertise in advocacy and activism.

Providing a safe, conducive environment and enough time for learning big and small practical skills, make mistakes and ask "silly questions", which looks like -

1. Learning how to draft and agenda, plan and facilitate a meeting.
2. Learning aspects of organising online and in-person events.
3. Learning how to use the software and tools that are critical to advocacy work.

2.2 Participation

Within MYAN, meaningful participation of young people fosters their critical awareness, thought leadership, and well-informed advocacy that shapes their own lives and wider society. MYAN seeks to create spaces and opportunities for young people to exercise their rights through education, engagement, and effective participation. In our context, youth participation is transformative; driving social justice, shifting power structures, and advancing the realisation of young people's rights. We support young people to strengthen their leadership, exercise their voice, and confidently influence policy and decision-making.

The National Youth Settlement Framework (NYSF) states that:

"A rights-based approach empowers young people to understand and exercise their rights and increases the ability and accountability of individuals and organisations that are responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of young people. A rights-based approach ensures that both the standards and the principles of human rights are integrated into policymaking as well as the day-to-day running of organisations, including service delivery."

Guiding principles outlined by young people for Youth Participation at MYAN:

Strengthening thematic recruitment and continuing to leverage the existing skills and interests that young people have on particular topics relevant to youth settlement.

Having formal and informal recognition of young people's achievements and competencies which supports their positive identity formation, motivation and progress as become more empowered. This could be done through:

- Monthly shoutouts
- Alumni bulletin
- Social media promotion

Bridging the gap between MYAN's key strategic stakeholders or important decision makers (e.g Governance group and Federal Government Departments) and young people, enabling them to engage directly with them in a supported way. This can strengthen their participation in stakeholder engagement and demystify the processes behind projects, programs and policy making.

Ensuring a transparent closing the loop process allows young people to understand and reflect on the impact and outcomes of their work, advocacy, and efforts. This process not only enhances their learning, education, and sense of empowerment, but also reinforces that their contributions remain valuable even when predetermined outcomes are not fully achieved or the impact differs from what was intended.

2.3 Inclusion

At MYAN, young people will be provided a safe, accessible and welcoming spaces to be themselves and be supported to become agents of positive change. An inclusive environment can be fostered by applying the NYSF Good Practice Capabilities below:

- Cultural Intelligence
- Youth - centred
- Strength - based
- Trauma - informed and,
- Family - aware.

MYAN's established culture, processes, structures, policies, and advocacy is conducive to sustaining an inclusive environment for young people and we are committed to constructive feedback and continuous improvement.

Guiding principles outlined by young people for Inclusive Environments at MYAN:

Wellbeing, Safety, and Psycho-Social Support

- Integrate formal welfare briefings with designated welfare officers, regular welfare checks, and psycho-social support across all programs, consultations, and events involving young people.
- Provide clear policies, training, and resources to help young volunteers protect their physical health and mental wellbeing while engaged in MYAN activities.

Inclusive Culture, Gender Balance, and Innovation

- Foster a safe, inclusive environment where young people feel empowered to propose and test innovative approaches, supported by better gender balance, strong local and state partnerships, and clear policies on travel, social media, grievances, conflict resolution, and a code of conduct.

Build Rapport and Strong Connections

- Strengthen in-person connections and engage young people earlier, while ensuring clear communication about project scope, timelines, and expectations.
- Develop clear Terms of Reference collaboratively and articulate work culture expectations to enhance understanding, improve efficiency in meetings, and support sustained motivation and retention.



3. MYAN Alumni Network

Young people that have been engaged with MYAN have expressed strong interest and motivation to remain connected with each other and with MYAN, even after their official “term” as has concluded. This continuity is important because many MYAN alumni go on to achieve remarkable things in Australia and globally, and their stories are worth celebrating. An alumni network also ensures that even individuals beyond the predefined youth categories continue to have opportunities to stay engaged and contribute. They can have a strong role in representation for emerging leaders and act as mentors or role models.

To support this, young people suggested several avenues of engagement:

3.1. Engagement through MYAN’s Communications Channels

E-newsletter: Alumni could be featured through a dedicated “Alumni Highlight” section. Submissions might be collected on an ad hoc basis, with MYAN maintaining a standing Expression of Interest (EOI) link for alumni to share updates, projects, or initiatives. MYAN could also proactively reach out to alumni to showcase their work or amplify important causes.

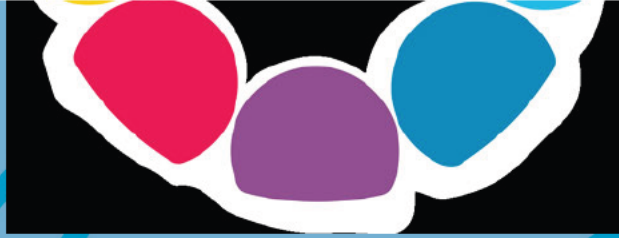
LinkedIn: A private alumni LinkedIn group would provide a professional and accessible space for members to share their work, seek advice, and collaborate. It could also serve as a channel for MYAN to share relevant opportunities directly with alumni.

3.2. Alumni Events

Online Events: Informal skills-sharing sessions or webinars, led by alumni and facilitated by MYAN, could provide valuable peer-to-peer learning. These sessions might focus on topical issues, practical tools, or insights that alumni can apply in their ongoing work and advocacy.

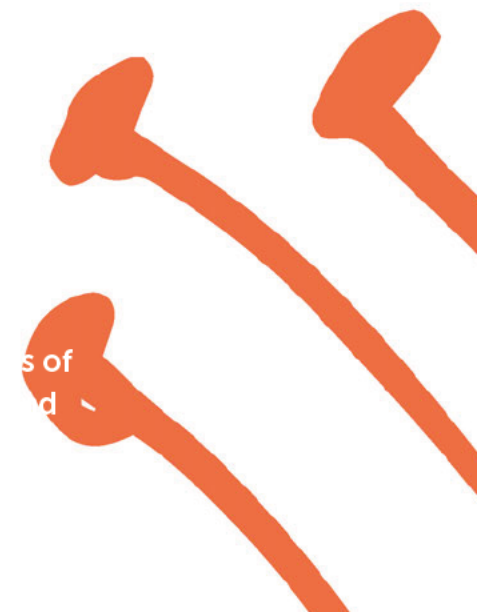
In-Person Events: Biennial alumni gatherings, structured more like thematic reunions than formal conferences, would provide spaces for networking, collaboration, and inspiration. These events could be designed around a clear purpose or goal, with alumni actively involved in planning, fundraising, and securing sponsorship to cover costs.





Acknowledgment:

This strategy was made possible through the contributions of the MYAN Youth Advisory Group 2024-25, whose voices and perspectives have been central to its development.





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Meaningful partnership with young people

What does it look like and why does it work?

Value paper

February, 2024

At a glance

Collaborating and partnering with community members is an increasing focus for governments and non-government organisations. Done well, it can lead to more responsive initiatives that have greater impact than those developed and delivered in silos. However, doing it well requires careful thought and planning. This is especially the case when it comes to young people from multicultural backgrounds.

Examples of youth participation during and since the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate how governments partnering with young people from multicultural backgrounds through an intermediary can improve program and policy implementation. Key features of successful partnerships include: (1) allowing greater time and resourcing; (2) clarity and transparency around scope and expectations; (3) deliberate and effective power sharing; and (4) sourcing and listening to diverse voices.

Recommendations for building meaningful partnerships

1. *Consider young people's unique needs and aspirations, early and often:* Making additional accommodations to remove barriers for young people from multicultural backgrounds.
2. *Challenge and avoid assumptions:* Identifying and addressing biases, misconceptions and assumptions often made about young people, including unconscious ones.
3. *Optimise intermediaries to guarantee safety and genuineness:* Partnering with mediators like MYAN or youth workers with experience supporting multicultural young people.

Introduction

The post-pandemic (COVID-19) period is a time when 'co' – taken from the word collaboration – has become a prefix added to a growing list of verbs such as co-produce, co-develop, co-create and most notably, co-design.¹ It is generally accepted that these participatory forms of partnership not only reduce duplication and optimise existing strengths and resources, but also that they can lead to better outcomes. This is because when people are involved in designing things that they will/may ultimately use, they are more likely to engage with, share, promote and take ownership over the final product; and that product is more likely to be responsive to their needs, and the needs of others like them². While the recent surge in visibility may make these approaches to planning, designing and delivering work seem new, many organisations and groups have been partnering with members of the community/client groups they serve such as young people for some time.

This value paper was prepared by Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network Australia (MYAN) and Monash University's Health and Social Care Unit (HSCU) to explore how partnering and working with young people, specifically those from multicultural backgrounds, can enhance the responsiveness and effectiveness of programs and policies. To do this it draws on evidence from academic and grey literature exploring the importance and benefits of youth participation, and includes recent local case studies to showcase what meaningful partnerships look like and what they can achieve. To finish, this paper includes a series of recommendations and reflective questions to guide the building of genuine partnerships with young people from multicultural backgrounds for program and policy design.

¹ Vargas C, Whelan J, Brimblecombe J, Allender S. (2022) Co-creation, co-design and co-production for public health: a health: a perspective on definitions and distinctions. *Public Health Res Pract*, 32(2):[e3222211](https://doi.org/10.2196/22211).

² Tembo, D., Hickey, G., Montenegro, C., Chandler, D., Nelson, E., Porter, K. et al. (2021). Effective engagement and involvement with community stakeholders in the co-production of global health research. *British Medical Journal*, 372(178). doi: [10.1136/bmj.n178](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n178).

What do meaningful partnerships with young people look like?

While many policy professionals understand the idea of collaboration/participation, they often report experiencing challenges putting it into practice. Some of the commonly reported ones include: narrow windows for policy development and delivery due to unpredictability of political events and cycles; competing pressures, such as reliance on traditional (e.g. academic, internally-generated) over community-contributed evidence; and rigidity around redirection of funds to cover the true cost of participation. However, many simply lack the “know-how” – the training, exposure and experience – needed to plan and deliver safe, meaningful and effective participation,³ particularly with cohorts like migrants and refugees.

As such, this section of the paper presents three recent, real-life case studies to help provide a clear picture of what it looks like to partner with multicultural young people in a meaningful and effective way. This is followed by a summary of the key features of participation done well.

Co-design with young people

“Through this co-design process I got to learn the various processes and steps in making sure our social media content was inclusive and accessible. Another great experience for me has been working with Aza ... to organise activities and events I can independently host and run in my local communities.”

Sania Ali, SA MYAN YAG



During the COVID-19 pandemic, with funding from the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care, a Youth Reference Group (YRG) was established to provide advice and support the co-design and delivery of COVID-19 vaccination promotion activities. The YRG, established and facilitated by MYAN, was comprised of 1-2 young people, aged between 17 and 26 years, from each Australian state and territory, and a range of diverse cultural backgrounds.

The YRG met on a weekly-fortnightly basis to provide advice to MYAN, based on their own lived experience and consultation with other young people, on:

- the strategies and activities that might work best to reach young people
- the barriers and challenges young people from multicultural backgrounds may experience understanding and acting on COVID-19 vaccine information
- any misconceptions, assumptions or biases MYAN/government need to address.

Beyond providing advice, the YRG also supported MYAN to design and test resources, strategies and approaches; and conduct consultations with other young people. Combined their efforts reached over 1,200 young people from multicultural backgrounds in-person, and many more through social and online media.

Since its inception, the Youth Reference Group (YRG), now the Youth Advisory Group (YAG), has continued to support the design and delivery of health promotion activities, including campaigns focused on cancer screening and the harms of vaping. Within three months, the online Cancer Screening Awareness campaign

³ Ocloo, J., Garfield, S., Franklin, B.D. *et al.* Exploring the theory, barriers and enablers for patient and public involvement across health, social care and patient safety: a systematic review of reviews. *Health Research Policy and Systems* 19, 8 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-020-00644-3>

reached approximately 80,000 young people across multiple states through MYAN's social media efforts. Additionally, a co-facilitated in-person information session on cervical and breast cancer was held in regional Victoria, with 25 young women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including international students. Furthermore, more than 50 young people participated in an online forum to discuss strategies for sharing cancer screening information with their parents and grandparents.

Youth-led activities



"The reason why this project was effective is because participants had creative freedom, it was open and not pushing for a specific agenda, instead it let young people create their own agenda. It also mattered that the young people that participated were engaged and continue to be involved in the youth space – they were part of the initial consultations and had a genuine interest in the project."

Mehak Sheik,
A Day in Our Life participant

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the YRG established and facilitated by MYAN (above), also led the delivery of a range of strategic activities. This included:

Instagram takeover

In November 2022, for a seven-day period, MYAN's YRG were given permission to share content they designed and created through MYAN's Instagram channel. They were provided with guidelines on the ethical use of social media and a topic to create their content on.

Analyses of social media metrics from this time illustrate:

- a gradual increase in the number of story views throughout the week.
- higher overall engagement when compared to other posts.
- the YRG's short 10 second videos became the most sort out content by MYAN's followers.

A Day in Our Life

MYAN's YRG also developed the A Day in Our Life campaign, which includes 14 video developed by and featuring young people from multicultural backgrounds. Through the videos, young people share real narratives of daily life during this time, including staying safe and healthy, and supporting each other, their families and communities. The videos have been viewed over 2,207 times to date – a number that continues to grow. Additionally, the campaign also won a global award for best practice in COVID-19 messaging and was picked up by many other organisations including UNICEF and WHO. This includes being prepared as a [case study](#) by Collective Service – a strategic partnership between United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and World Health Organization (WHO), with the support of Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN).

The Youth Advisory Group (YAG) is now leading a national online campaign focused on vaping harm reduction. As part of this initiative, they have developed a series of engaging social media materials tailored for distribution across multicultural communities.

Advocacy and policy

"My work with MYAN has given me an incredible opportunity to speak directly to important decision makers at the Department of Health ... As a YAG representative, I presented the co-design digital materials to the department for their feedback. I



believe that our work will translate to better outreach our communities, improving their health and wellbeing for years to come."

Konan Masuda, Tas MYAN YAG

Key features of genuine partnerships

The success of the above examples can be attributed to the genuineness of the partnerships developed with the young people involved, and the attempts made by MYAN to eliminate tokenism and maintain engagement through their expertise. Key strategies to achieve this include:

- allowing **greater time and resourcing** to set-up and deliver engagement with multicultural young people, such as translating necessary resources; navigating availability due to commitments (e.g. school, work, hobbies); and ensuring additional needs (e.g. disability) are accommodated.
- being **clear and transparent** from the beginning about scope and expectations. This ensures that the partnership is based on a shared understanding, that expectations are managed effectively and young people can make informed decisions about their involvement.

A key strategy for this has been through a series of roundtable discussions, attended by representatives from the Department of Health and Aged Care, government ministers, health and medical experts, and health and settlement service providers.

Through these roundtable discussions, MYAN supported over 58 young people to connect with and hear directly from scientists and government representatives, and to ask them questions that were answered in real time. The young people were also given the opportunity to advise and inform policy makers on current issues and strategic ideas in a safe and supported way. These roundtables were the first-time young people from multicultural backgrounds had an opportunity to engage with and inform policy on a national scale.

In addition to establishing and convening the Youth Advisory Group (YAG), MYAN serves as the go-to organisation for young people from multicultural backgrounds, building trust while creating long-term opportunities for their development beyond a single engagement. Unlike a stand-alone youth advisory group, MYAN provides sustained support, capacity-building, and pathways that ensure young people's involvement is not transactional but leads to ongoing leadership and advocacy roles. This approach prevents engagement gaps and ensures young people continue to grow, influence decision-making, and drive change over time.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, MYAN has played a critical role in enabling young people to connect with government and service providers in safe, meaningful, and impactful ways, including:

- Facilitating direct engagement with decision-makers through advocacy programs and campaigns.
- Supporting young people to speak on panels and in public forums.
- Providing opportunities to contribute to research and share lived experiences.
- Using social media to raise awareness and mobilise support.

- **sharing power** for making key decisions, which includes involving young people early enough in ideation and priority setting so that their voices can shape these processes. This also involves, where possible, handing over as much power to young people to lead the implementation of the ideas and activities they have supported the development of.
- ensuring **diverse and intersectional voices** are heard, including young people from a range of cultural backgrounds, geographic areas, ages, abilities, gender and sexual orientations and settlement stages. This first involves recognising that, all young people have vastly different lived experiences, and that while it is not possible to achieve “representativeness” (i.e. where all experiences and voices are heard together), it is essential to capture the greatest diversity possible when making decisions and plans.

Why are meaningful partnerships important?

Participation is a fundamental right. It is one of the guiding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that has been reiterated in many other Conventions and Declarations that have relevance for young people from multicultural backgrounds, such as:

- [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), **Article 12** which states governments must ensure young people have the right *and* opportunity to express views on matters affecting them
- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), **Articles 19 and 25** which emphasise the rights of all people to take part in civil and political discussions, such as policy development.

In the Australian Context:

- [The National Youth Settlement Framework](#) emphasises the need for genuine partnership with young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly as their unique challenges are often unrecognised when they are viewed as a sub-set of either the broader youth or settlement sectors.

The growing emphasis on youth participation in key doctrines such as the above and others, is no mistake with evidence of the positive impacts of partnering with young people growing fast. In addition to the increased responsiveness, relevance, uptake and impact of co-designed policies (described above), partnering with young people also has additional positive impacts for them as individuals. The United Nations recognises that participation empowers young people to have agency in their own and their communities' development by building life-skills (e.g. workplace conduct, communication) and knowledge around rights, advocacy and citizenship.⁴ It is also recognised as a strong contributor to leadership skills and qualities (e.g. public speaking, altruism, negotiation); career progression; and social skills and resources (e.g. networks, relationships).⁵ Lastly, political participation supports young second generation migrants to manage multiple cultural belongings and consolidate a positive sense of identity in a new country like Australia.⁶

How can governments partner with young people to improve outcomes?

To truly improve the way young people are engaged and collaborated with, and ultimately the outcomes they experience, a number of adjustments are required. Many of these are concrete, practical changes that are relatively straightforward to implement, such as those described above (see Key features of genuine partnerships). Whereas, others may be more abstract, such as applying a lens/way of seeing things, adjusting the fundamental approaches used or shifting professionals' mindsets and cultural attitudes. This section of the paper aims to balance these, offering a series of recommendations and resources to help government ministers, public servants and others involved in making or implementing public policy to better partner with young people from multicultural backgrounds. For those that are more abstract/conceptual, links to resources have been provided to aid understanding and operationalisation.

⁴ United Nations Youth. (2013). [Youth participation](#)

⁵ Anyon Y, Bender K, Kennedy H, Dechants J. A Systematic Review of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in the United States: Methodologies, Youth Outcomes, and Future Directions. *Health Education & Behavior*. 2018;45(6):865-878. doi:[10.1177/1090198118769357](#)

⁶ Mansouri, F., & Jamal Al-deen, T. (2023). Acts of transcultural belonging and social empowerment among migrant youth. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46(10), 1997–2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2023.2174811>

Recommendations

1. Consider young people's unique needs and aspirations, early and often

At the most basic level, young people from multicultural backgrounds need the same as any other demographic group in order to participate meaningfully. They need to feel like they are respected as individuals, that their voices are valued, that they will have a legitimate opportunity to contribute or have influence and that they will be informed of how their insights/contributions have (or have not) been used. Beyond this, [they need many additional things](#), specific to their age and cultural background. These are likely to differ from young person to young person, so taking a person-centred and strength based, case-by-case approach is recommended. However, some of the common ones include:

- ☐ recognising that young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds are diverse in their interests, socio-economic backgrounds, and cultural and religious identities, etc. This should be acknowledged and reflected in efforts to recruit as widely as possible
- ☐ facilitating engagement activities in the evening or on weekends so those with school, university or work commitments are not excluded
- ☐ hosting engagement activities in locations that are close to public transport or are otherwise familiar to, and frequented by young people from multicultural backgrounds
- ☐ allowing young people to bring an adult (e.g. A youth worker or a parent/guardian) with them for support
- ☐ ensuring language support (i.e. translation *and* interpretation) is budgeted for and offered so that young people are not excluded due to low English proficiency
- ☐ allocating greater time to planning/pre-implementation stages to allow young people time to become familiar with systems and ways of working and find their voice
- ☐ recognising and respecting socio-cultural sensitivities related to gender, religion, class, age, etc., and seeking advice from leaders on how best to navigate them.
- ☐ incorporating questions and prompts about young people's strengths, aspiration and interests into conversations.

Reflective questions:

- What scope do you have to [make adjustments](#) to your standard ways of working and the timeframes typically allocated for engagement? If needed, how can you advocate for more scope or make creative adjustments to allow great space to engage meaningfully?
- Do your standard approaches to recruiting young people for engagement/consultation opportunities produce groups with diverse characteristics? How can you improve your approaches to [recruitment and planning](#) increase this diversity?
- How can you [creatively "close the loop"](#) with young people in a way that illustrates how their contributions/insights have (or have not) been used, communicates how you have valued their input, and preserves their willingness to re-engage in the future?

2. Challenge and avoid assumptions

While racism still exists, more often it is assumptions and unconscious biases that drive cultural insensitivity in partnership work. This makes them easier to address through reflective practice and capacity building. Some common ones to avoid include assuming:

- ☐ all young people have good digital literacy and access to technology (e.g. smart devices). Or on the other hand, assuming they *do not*, simply because they are from a multicultural background
- ☐ young people have, or do not have, English proficiency or fundamental literacy in other languages they speak

- young people have, or do not have, certain knowledge/competencies, attitudes or beliefs and can therefore “represent” a particular cultural ethnic group. They may or may not share these characteristics with family members and others from their community of older generations, and this may change over time the longer they are in Australia
- young people have the same or similar views and can therefore “represent” all young people. Depending their level of acculturation, time in Australia and whether they are first, second, etc., generation, they may have very different views to other young people.

Reflective questions:

- What assumptions, biases and misconceptions do you have about young people from multicultural backgrounds, including unconscious/implicit ones that you could [identify and address](#) to ensure they don't influence your thinking, planning and decision making?
- How can you [“call in” or “call out”](#) other when you observe them behaving in a way that is driven by unconscious/implicit bias or is racist or discriminatory?
- What [policies or systems](#) (e.g. checklists, processes, flowcharts) might help prompt others to identify and address their biases and safeguard against racism?

3. Optimise intermediaries to guarantee safety and genuineness

Many young people from multicultural backgrounds are reluctant or fearful of engaging directly with public servants, policy makers or others they perceive as an authority. There are many reasons for this, including:

- a distrust or fear of government based on traumatic or negatives experiences in countries of origin or transit (e.g. dictatorships, civil war, genocide, etc)⁷
- concerns about visa status, particularly for those seeking asylum⁷
- the complexity of government systems that make it challenging for young people to know where and how to engage, or even that engagement is an option for them.

To ensure approaches are culturally and developmentally/age appropriate, policy makers should engage with young people indirectly, through a partnership broker/intermediary (e.g. MYAN/CMY) or personal support person (e.g. Youth Worker, parent/guardian) who has expertise working with young people, specifically those from multicultural backgrounds. Not only are these bodies able to reach into networks of young people that government alone would not be able to, but they can also provide advice and support around how to set-up and facilitate engagement efforts to be culturally safe. Likewise, due to the hard-earned trust these bodies have built with young people, they are also able to “vouch” for government when encouraging young people's participation.⁸

Reflective questions:

- How successful are your current approaches to recruiting young people? Have you been able to engage young people experiencing vulnerability, hardship, capacity or availability challenges? What has and hasn't worked for you in relation to this?
- How can you draw on intermediaries like MYAN/CMY to help you improve the cultural sensitivity and safety of your engagement efforts? Who else can you draw on if the

⁷ Shepherd, S. M., & Masuka, G. (2021). Working With At-Risk Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People in Australia: Risk Factors, Programming, and Service Delivery. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 32(5), 469-483. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403420929416>

⁸ Seale, H., Harris-Roxas, B., Heywood, A. *et al.* The role of community leaders and other information intermediaries during the COVID-19 pandemic: insights from the multicultural sector in Australia. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 9, 174 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01196-3>

young people you are trying to engage display nervousness, reluctance, disengagement or are simply not reached by your recruitment efforts?

Conclusion

In a world where it is increasingly accepted that involving people in designing and delivering solutions to problems they intimately understand leads to better outcomes, it is important to think critically about how and when is best to partner. This is especially the case for collaboration with young people from multicultural backgrounds, where engagement needs to be well thought through and planned to ensure participation is safe and effective.

Young people from multicultural backgrounds, particularly those engaged by MYAN, throughout and since the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated a sophisticated ability to: contribute to discussions about policy design and implementation, and design and deliver bespoke health promotion activities for other young people from similar backgrounds. In Australia, where this has been most effective is when young people are engaged through an intermediary who they know and trust. As such, while professionals improving their own practices and approaches for engaging with young people is necessary, it is still recommended that governments in particular engage with young people indirectly such as through a partnership broker/intermediary.

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