



September 2023

We would like to begin this submission by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands that make up Australia, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Before European colonisation, this land was home to a rich tapestry of over 400 Indigenous languages spoken for more than 65,000 years. This living language legacy is an integral part of our nation's cultural richness that we carry proudly. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As we discuss the state and future of multilingualism in Australia, we do so with the profound understanding that this country has a long, enduring history of linguistic diversity.

Multilingual Australia (MA) is pleased to submit our submission to The Department of Home Affairs' Multicultural Framework Review (The Review). MA is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to supporting families from diverse linguistic backgrounds since 2002. Formerly known as Bilingual Families Perth, our mission is to identify and address the needs of children, parents, and grandparents from non-English speaking backgrounds who want to maintain and use languages other than English at home.

Our vision is a language-friendly Australia. We help people connect, learn, and maintain their languages by helping families overcome barriers that may prevent them from using their native languages, providing opportunities and resources and fostering strong relationships. MA also advocates for multilingualism in the broader community by raising awareness about the benefits of multilingualism and linguistic diversity. A more inclusive and diverse Australia is one that values and celebrates linguistic diversity.

Addressing the Submission's Key Priorities

This submission draws on Multilingual Australia's 20 years of experience working with families from diverse linguistic backgrounds, a community roundtable held in March 2023 in Western Australia, another recent regional roundtable, an issue paper, and findings from a targeted survey. These various sources collectively emphasise language's vital role in individual identity and cultural heritage. The community roundtables and survey findings particularly highlighted the significance of maintaining and promoting linguistic diversity across Australia. It's evident from these diverse consultations that language is not just a tool for communication but a crucial element in sustaining cultural connections and a sense of identity within both individual communities and the broader Australian society.

MA's continuous engagement with multilingual families finds that a failure to consider both existing and potential barriers to supporting multilingual families results in a lack of access and participation of multicultural families in Australian society. We are concerned that The Review's final recommendations identify existing and potential systemic barriers preventing people from





multilingual communities from participating in Australian society. This may also limit the effectiveness of future federal diversity, equity and inclusion strategies that affect all multicultural communities regardless of whether they are multilingual or not.

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Linking Languages Policies To Social Cohesion

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LANGUAGES?

Data on Languages

The coexistence of numerous languages, including Indigenous and immigrant languages, showcases the country's multicultural heritage and emphasizes the importance of supporting language diversity to foster inclusivity and cultural understanding.



429

Languages Spoken in Australia



183

Australian Indigenous
Languages



249

Languages Spoken in Western
Australia



16,000

people use AUSLAN
at home

Australia's rich tapestry of languages, representing an astonishing 429 in total, is a cornerstone of its multicultural identity. Despite this, there has been a glaring absence of a National Policy on Languages to guide the nation's approach to its linguistic diversity. Beyond English, our homes resonate with the sounds of Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese, Cantonese, Punjabi, Greek, Italian, Tagalog, Hindi, and Spanish, among many others. This linguistic wealth doesn't just add numbers to our diversity statistics; it reflects a multitude of experiences, stories, and perspectives that enrich our society.

However, Multilingual Australia asserts that an underinvestment in linguistic diversity leads to less effective engagement with multicultural communities, particularly in critical situations. This has been observed in health communication strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic, in Home Affairs' education efforts on 'foreign interference,' and in handling labour shortages that have economic implications.

Although valuable, the current focus on translation and interpreting services does not fully capture the essence of what language diversity means to many Australians. These services are vital but should not be the end-all of our engagement with linguistically diverse communities. They risk reducing language to a mere tool for communication, neglecting its vital role as a connector to one's heritage and identity.

Therefore, we argue for a more expansive, integrated approach that includes translation and interpretation, values multilingual staff and collaborates with community organisations. Such an approach would aim for a genuinely inclusive society where languages are viewed as assets and where individuals are free from linguistic discrimination and bias.





In this context, Multilingual Australia is committed to reshaping the conversation around language policy and social cohesion. We believe navigating beyond the limited focus on English is imperative to recognise and leverage the rich linguistic diversity that makes Australia truly unique.

Data and the Way We Collect Language-Related Information

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The number of people who are bilingual/multilingual increased by nearly 800,000 (792,062) from 2016 to over 5.5 million people

22.3% of the total population.



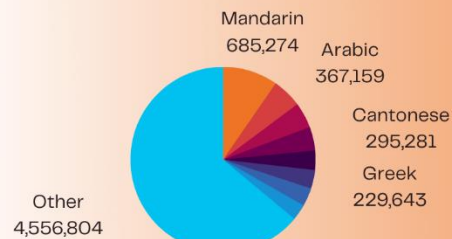
But this is an underestimate.



850,000 (852,706) of this group reported that they do not speak English well or at all. That's an increase of around 4% from the 2016 census.



What are the most spoken languages other than English at home?



Unfortunately, the current methods employed in Australia for gathering language-related information are rather limited and dated. Primarily, questions focus on languages other than English spoken at home. This data collection approach has significant limitations.

Firstly, it overlooks a significant portion of the population who might have acquired languages for professional needs or personal interests. Such individuals may not necessarily speak these languages at home but are nonetheless proficient, thereby underestimating the true extent of Australia's multilingual capabilities. The failure to capture this data compromises the broader picture, masking the tangible and intangible benefits associated with a multilingual society.

Secondly, we continue to use outdated terminology such as "Languages Other Than English" (LOTE) in our language-related data collection. Such terminology feels archaic and has the effect of compartmentalising language skills, which are far more fluid and expansive in reality.

Notably, focusing solely on the top 10 languages identified through Census data overlooks the linguistic diversity of Australia, covering only a fraction—approximately one-third (as pictured above)—of multilingual speakers in the country. This narrow approach hinders effective communication and resource allocation. By adopting a more comprehensive method for collecting language data, we could more accurately identify the linguistic needs of various communities. This

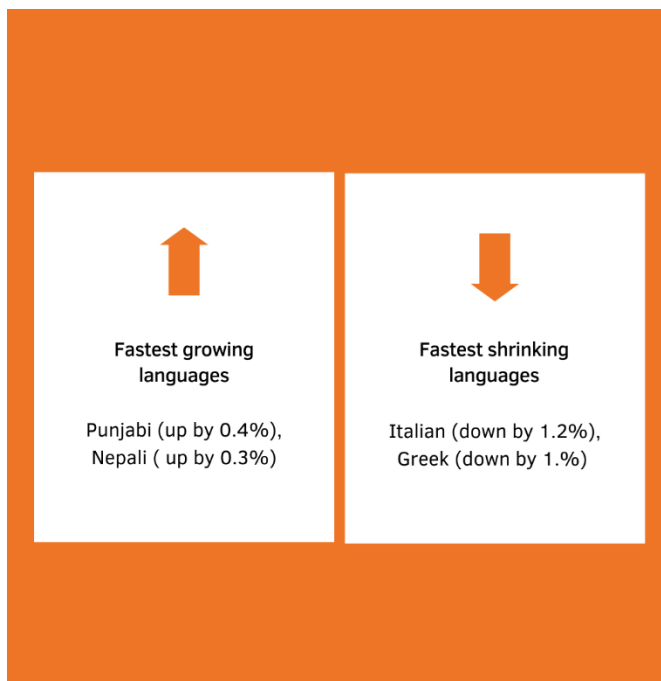




in turn, would allow for more targeted translation services, thereby enhancing accessibility and inclusivity across the nation.

By contrast, some nations like Germany have adopted a more inclusive approach to acknowledging language skills, irrespective of where the language is spoken or learned. This form of data collection provides a much richer, more nuanced snapshot of a nation's linguistic diversity. It can also help reduce the prevalent biases related to accent and language and improve intercultural communication.

Furthermore, we need to reframe the conversation around language learning, moving it from a 'nice-to-have' to an essential skill with far-reaching implications. The lack of language skills should be seen as an absence and a missed opportunity for both the individual and society. A broader understanding of language capabilities can, therefore, contribute to cultural richness enhance social cohesion and create a more inclusive society.



Australia is a graveyard of languages

Australia, while being a melting pot of languages, has also experienced significant language loss. Multilingual Australia aims to address the challenge of intergenerational language transmission to preserve linguistic diversity. By promoting language revitalisation and supporting community-led initiatives, the goal is to prevent further language extinction and maintain the nation's rich cultural heritage.

Language Support Needs to Go Beyond the Classroom

Multilingual Australia welcomes the increased funding support for community language schools as a step in the right direction. Nonetheless, our internal survey and roundtable discussions reveal that the issue is far more multi-layered, indicating that existing measures are insufficient to meet the real needs of families striving to sustain their languages at home. Undoubtedly, community schools are needed, but we need more attention given to families beyond the classrooms.





Economic constraints and inadequate focus on languages were among the significant issues flagged in our survey—one respondent enrolled their child in a French school for merely two hours weekly. The concept of personal agency in language preservation was also noted; however, respondents agreed that schools need to provide more robust language programs.

Another layer to this challenge is the scarcity of resources for lesser-known languages like Pashto. This is not just an institutional oversight but points to systemic lapses. Respondents conveyed a desire for enriched linguistic environments through activities like storytelling or sporting events in their native languages. Regional discussions in Western Australia substantiated these concerns. Libraries in these regions often lack adequate resources for language learning, severely impacting communities like the Ukrainian and Taiwanese.

A comparative international perspective also emerged from our roundtables, highlighting that Australia's monolingual policy framework is increasingly discordant with global trends. Canada, for example, has a highly successful multi-language educational system that also contributes to community well-being. There was a consensus that educational institutions should recognise languages as an asset rather than a liability.

Our community is asking for decisive national leadership on this issue. The erosion of languages affects familial heritage and broader implications for social cohesion and cultural diversity. The need to preserve languages in both oral and written forms was frequently stressed, as the loss in one domain often precipitates the loss in the other. The feedback underscores our collective responsibility to instigate change across multiple sectors, including libraries, schools, and homes.

Policy Goals: Re-emphasising the 'L' in CaLD While Acknowledging the Need for Change

Multilingual Australia is keenly aware of the ongoing debate surrounding the CaLD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) terminology. While we concur that the term warrants evolution to keep pace with contemporary perspectives, we strongly advocate for changes that continue to underline the importance of linguistic diversity. The term currently encapsulates "linguistically diverse," which, although frequently sidelined, offers valuable leverage in our discussions and advocacy initiatives. Modifying the term to encompass marginalised, ethnic, or cultural attributes solely could inadvertently compromise our tireless efforts to champion multilingualism among Australian families.

In its present form, Australia's policy landscape is heavily slanted towards promoting multiculturalism through the narrow prism of an English-speaking society. This monolingual focus is even linked to notions of 'Australian Values,' creating a paradox that muddies the waters of cultural, ethnic, and religious inclusion. Given the fact that more than 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English in their homes, this limited approach inevitably undermines the effectiveness of any policy aiming to represent and support Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity genuinely.

Moreover, it's important to note that many multicultural frameworks and policies are often short sighted and generally designed with only one generational plan in mind. This approach tends to





overlook the experiences and needs of second and third-generations and youth grappling with their dual identities. We can break free from this restrictive mindset with a more robust focus on multilingualism. By doing so, we pave the way for a more holistic approach to culture, language, and heritage that benefits more than just one generation. This broadened perspective also strengthens the bonds between newly arrived Australians and those who have been part of this diverse landscape for longer.

By giving linguistic diversity its deserved prominence within these policy goals, we not only enrich the individual experiences of Australia's residents but also contribute to weaving a richer, more inclusive social fabric for the nation as a whole.

The Benefits Of Adopting A 'Multilingual View.' Across All Governments.

Taking on a 'multilingual view' opens up a world of opportunities and benefits that go far beyond the ability to communicate in more than one language. It's an approach that enriches personal growth and cultural understanding and significantly impacts various sectors such as education, healthcare, and the economy. The advantages aren't just for individuals; they ripple out to communities and the nation as a whole, making Australia more inclusive, diverse, and globally competitive.

Here are some key benefits that we'll dive into, many of which have been echoed by members of our community in our recent survey. Whether it's increasing employability, fostering a more inclusive society, or making Australia a global player in various industries, the benefits of adopting a 'multilingual view' are truly manifold.

1. **Enhanced Cognitive Skills:** A majority of our respondents said, "Being multilingual helps us think more clearly and creatively." This backs up research indicating cognitive benefits like problem-solving and multitasking.
2. **Social Inclusion:** "I feel included when my language is acknowledged," said a survey participant. A multilingual society is inherently inclusive, breaking down linguistic barriers that might otherwise lead to social exclusion.
3. **Economic Gain:** One business owner mentioned, "Having multilingual staff has opened new markets for us." Multilingual employees create opportunities for companies to grow and compete on a global scale.
4. **Cultural Enrichment:** "Understanding multiple languages gives me a richer view of the world," noted another respondent. Multilingualism promotes empathy and a deeper understanding of diverse cultures.
5. **Better Healthcare:** "When the doctor speaks my language, I feel more comfortable discussing my health," shared one participant. Effective multilingual communication in healthcare settings can significantly improve patient outcomes.





6. **Crisis Management:** "During the bushfires, I got my info from a community radio in my language," one person reported. Whether dealing with natural disasters or health crises, being multilingual ensures that crucial information is accessible to everyone.
7. **Preservation of Heritage:** "I want my kids to speak my native language so they understand their roots," a parent expressed. Multilingualism helps to keep cultural heritage alive for future generations.
8. **Educational Advantages:** "Since my kids started bilingual education, their grades in other subjects have also improved," reported a family. Bilingual education has a ripple effect, improving skills in areas like math and science as well.
9. **Global Citizenship:** "Speaking different languages helps me understand global issues better," said a young respondent. Multilingual individuals are better equipped to contribute to global conversations and solutions.
10. **National Security:** "Multilingual community members can act as bridges in times of conflict," stated a survey participant. Multilingualism strengthens national security by enhancing cultural understanding and intelligence capabilities.

By taking a 'multilingual view,' we're not just aligning with our vision of a language-friendly Australia. We're also responding to the community's lived experiences and needs, making for a more inclusive, efficient, and harmonised society.





Recommendations

As Australia continues to flourish as a multicultural and multilingual society, it's imperative that our policies reflect this richness and complexity. Our current approach to language and culture, while well-intended, often falls short of addressing the lived realities of millions of Australians. Recognising this, Multilingual Australia has developed targeted recommendations to make immediate and lasting changes. These recommendations aim to promote linguistic diversity and create a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient society for everyone. By addressing these areas of concern, we take steps towards realising our vision of a language-friendly Australia.

Recommendation 1: Develop a National Policy on Languages

Australia urgently needs a comprehensive National Policy on Languages. This policy should aim to integrate language diversity into the broader objectives of strengthening social cohesion and national identity. Schools could incorporate more language programs in their curriculum, workplaces could value linguistic diversity as a skill, and communities could host more language-themed events (current event fundings are based on culture, making some of these projects focusing on languages ineligible). Recognising multilingualism as an asset rather than a barrier would shift public opinion and foster a more inclusive society.

Recommendation 2: Cross-Portfolio Policies

Multilingualism should be included in government strategies across various portfolios such as Education, Health, Employment, and Social Services. This cross-portfolio approach ensures that multilingual communities are not isolated from policy benefits in key areas of life. For example, Health could work with Education to provide multilingual health literacy programs in schools. Languages are so much more than mere communication tools; they are bridges to understanding diverse cultures, perspectives, and ways of life.

Recommendation 3: Increase Resource Allocation

Sufficient funding and resources are pivotal for effective language programs and community engagement. Community centres, local governments, and schools should be adequately funded to offer language classes, cultural events, and resources like bilingual books and language apps. Such investments would enable more individuals to sustain and connect with their linguistic heritage, thereby enriching the Australian multicultural fabric.

Recommendation 4: Improve Crisis Communication

Effective communication is crucial, especially during emergencies like health crises or national security threats. Government agencies need to establish rapid and effective channels for disseminating important information in multiple languages. This could involve collaborating with community organisations and utilising social media platforms where multilingual communities are active. The aim is to ensure that no one is left uninformed due to language barriers.





Recommendation 5: Address Linguistic Discrimination

The existing "speak English only" mentality and biases against accents are forms of linguistic discrimination that need to be confronted head-on. Public campaigns could be utilised to raise awareness about the value of linguistic diversity and the harms of such biases. Schools and workplaces should also implement educational programs to address and rectify these deeply ingrained attitudes.

Recommendation 6: Recognise Linguistic Assets

Institutions and businesses should identify and value linguistic diversity as an asset. For instance, employees who speak multiple languages could be utilised in customer service roles, diplomatic positions, or international business dealings. An inclusive workforce drives effectiveness and symbolises a broader societal acceptance of linguistic diversity.

These expanded recommendations aim to offer a holistic approach that enhances Australia's multilingual and multicultural environment and tackles crucial issues like mental health and social cohesion.





Appendix A – Voices from the Community: Understanding Attitudes Towards Multilingualism in Australia

A targeted survey was carried out to enrich Multilingual Australia's contribution to the Multicultural Framework Review. The survey included nine questions focused on the topic of multilingualism and gathered input from 13 participants, the majority of whom are from Western Australia.

The respondents represent a diverse linguistic landscape, speaking languages such as English, Bahasa Malayu, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Gujarati, German, Mandarin, Pashto, Urdu, Nepali, Arabic, and Basque. Some respondents also indicated beginner-level proficiency in additional languages.

The following report provides an analysis of community perspectives on important subjects like crisis communication, overseas language policies, and strategies for preserving and promoting less commonly spoken languages in Australia.

Summary: Language and Culture Connection

Most respondents strongly feel that maintaining their native language is crucial for various reasons:

- **Communication with Elders:** Many mentioned the ability to communicate with elderly family members, valuing the role of language in understanding cultural nuances. One respondent said, "It means that I can speak to my elderly family members; the use of the language lets me understand the humour and the cultural importance of how we understand each other. It provides a belonging."
- **Bond with Family and Country of Birth:** Respondents talked about how their native language helps keep the bond strong with family in their country of birth, stating, "It helps with keeping the bond with my family in my country of birth as well as explore the culture without requiring translations."
- **Community Engagement:** Several respondents appreciated how their language skills have helped them integrate into new communities. For example, "It has allowed me to connect with new migrants and also to stay in contact with family back in South America."
- **Cultural Understanding:** Language is not just a tool for communication but also for understanding culture better. One said, "Helps me communicate with family and understand the culture better."
- **Expression:** A few mentioned the nuances of expressing oneself in their native language that English doesn't capture: "To talk to people & families from my culture, to express myself where English does not have the same meaning."
- **Global Connection:** Some respondents have mentioned the usefulness of their native language in staying current with issues affecting their community globally: "It's helped me communicate with my community at home and abroad. It has allowed me to access media and material in my mother tongue and therefore stay up to date and current with issues that affect my ethnic community."





- **Cultural Enrichment:** One respondent emphasised how language helped in gaining deeper cultural knowledge: "Helped me connect with the community through which I've acquired so much cultural knowledge and has enriched tremendously what I already had."
- **Accent and Flow:** Another unique perspective was about the role of accent and spoken nuances in cultural practices: "Native language embeds the daily activities and cultural practices in terms of celebration and lifestyle. In addition, the spoken accent of the native language has a regular flow without intonation, which is different from English."

These varied responses highlight the intricate relationship between language and cultural heritage, underscoring Australia's need for a strong multilingual framework.

Summary: Linguistic Identity and Australian Values

The responses to this question demonstrate a range of perspectives on how speaking a language other than English affects one's identity as an Australian and the implications for a modern, shared Australian identity.

- **Changing Attitudes Over Time:** One respondent spoke about shifting attitudes from shame to pride: "When I was young, speaking my native tongue brought shame... I proudly say, 'English isn't my first language.' Now that I am much older, I understand that we are all foreigners making Australia home unless you are Australian Aboriginal. That's my idea of a shared Australian identity."
- **Global Citizenship:** A multi-national perspective came from a respondent who said, "I am very proud to have become an Australian citizen. At the same time, I think it does not define me. I'd rather see us as citizens of the world."
- **Pride in Multiculturalism:** Another respondent succinctly stated, "Linguistic diversity is part of our multiculturalism."
- **Special Skill:** One respondent felt special due to their multilingualism, saying, "Affect my identity? Hmmm I guess it makes me feel special, because I can watch, read and have conversations in more than just one language."
- **Sense of Belonging:** A dual citizen remarked, "Speaking another language makes me feel even more Australian as we are a highly multicultural country."
- **Intercultural Communication:** One respondent linked language to being more aware of intercultural differences: "It helps me to be more aware of intercultural differences, so I can be conscious when communicating with people from different cultures. This is the value of being an Australian."
- **History and Inclusion:** Another person pointed out the historical aspect, saying, "There is a risk being made to feel 'not Australian enough' and being forced to adopt a hyphenated identity. But my languages have been part of the Australian identity since the Gold Rush era."
- **Embrace and Accept:** A respondent stated, "I believe it makes me a true Australian! We're all migrants! I believe it means that it must be embraced and accepted instead of rejecting it and fearing it."





- **Liaison Between Cultures:** Someone noted that being multilingual enriches identity: "Speaking more than one language strengthens the identity and makes it richer. I find myself as a liaison between multiple cultures."
- **Need for Solid Policy:** Lastly, a respondent emphasised the importance of solid language policies: "Language is closely related to identity. Linguistic diversity requires a solid language policy that will enable linguistic rights in the form of quality language instruction and maintenance, quality translation & interpreting services and more public figures from diverse linguistic backgrounds and accents."

These responses indicate a largely positive view of multilingualism, suggesting that it enhances rather than detracts from a modern, shared Australian identity. However, they also hint at the complexities and challenges that come with maintaining multiple languages and identities in Australia.

Summary: Language Barriers and Discrimination

The responses shed light on people's varying experiences regarding language barriers and discrimination in Australia.

- **Negative Correction:** One person stated that they find the "irritating way of being corrected" when mispronouncing words troubling. "For my mother, accessing services and communicating with people outside of the home was very challenging, and to this day, she still requires my help to understand English."
- **Job Opportunities:** One individual felt lucky, saying, "No. I'd say the opposite, I was lucky because my current boss was looking for people from overseas who speak different languages."
- **Underfunded Education:** One respondent lamented, "The biggest barrier I faced was access and opportunities to develop my German in Australia given how underfunded and disrespected language education is."
- **Preparation and Adjustment:** Another person shared, "Yes, I need to really prepare myself to learn terminologies and ask a lot of questions to minimise miscommunication."
- **Community Observations:** One respondent mentioned, "No I haven't but I have seen how people in my community have been discriminated against."
- **Workplace Discrimination:** One individual spoke about being "rejected due to being a non-native speaker of English or due to a poor accent in English in the workplace."
- **Accent Mocking:** A respondent who teaches in English mentioned that "children at my kids' school laugh at my accent, imitate it when I am speaking" and called this behaviour "another form of racism."

These quotes vividly capture the range of experiences related to language barriers, from facing outright discrimination to benefiting from multilingualism.





Summary: Educational Support for Heritage/Mother Languages

The feedback on educational support for heritage languages presents a mixed bag of experiences and perceptions.

- **Expense and Limited Focus:** One respondent shared, "There is a French school I send my children to 2 hours a week, but it is quite expensive. I feel there is not enough focus on the benefits of learning a LOTE (Language Other Than English)."
- **Personal Responsibility:** One respondent felt that maintaining their mother language is "something that doesn't depend on the support I could receive; it has to be my concern." They added, "We speak Spanish at home and enhance them to read in Spanish."
- **Lack of School Support:** One person plainly said, "Not enough, schools struggle to maintain language programs."
- **Limited Resources:** Another participant mentioned, "There is some for Urdu, but next to none for Pashto. I have had to work hard developing my own resources."
- **Excuses and Lack of Support:** One individual stated, "Not at all and what's worse, they continue to make excuses."
- **Global vs. Local:** Another respondent highlighted a "conflicting context of local diversity in terms of local heritage and global connectivity in terms of English language."
- **Importance Questioned:** One person didn't find this important "in light of the existence of various means of communication and electronic knowledge."

The quotes reveal that while some people are proactive in maintaining their languages, many feel that more could be done to support heritage language education in the community.

Summary: Youth and Multilingualism

The topic of raising children in a multilingual environment brought forth a variety of challenges and successes from the respondents.

- **Anticipation of Resources:** One person said, "I am not a parent yet, but I am looking forward to using your resources to help my child be bi or trilingual."
- **Family Communication:** Another respondent highlighted the importance of family ties, saying they "took my children to language playgroups when they were younger. Keep the communication with the family overseas."
- **Educational Policy:** One individual argued that "Education departments should allow other languages as a subject at school."
- **Child-Driven Learning:** A parent shared that their children are bilingual "Out of their own effort. They wanted to be bilingual, I just provided opportunities for them to learn, listen, and practice the language."





- **Wish for More Activities:** Another person expressed a desire for more community resources, saying, "I would like to have storytellers in Spanish, activities (sports, movies, etc.) in Spanish."
- **Solo Language Parent:** One parent faced the challenge of being the only German speaker in the home, stating, "There is no support for bilingual parents who are not 'fluent.'"
- **Systemic Issues:** Another person critiqued the Australian education system, saying, "The education system in Australia does not value language learning. Promoting the culture with enough funding to institutions will be the key."
- **Social Barriers:** A parent mentioned social issues and stigma, stating, "Lack of resources! And that's with a popular language! Or people looking at us weirdly at a park. Children are telling me I talk funny."
- **Monolingual Resources:** One parent noted, "Resources are mostly monolingual types either in English only or Nepali only."
- **Community Centres:** A suggestion was made for "special centres for teaching the language for those who wish to do so."
- **Cultural Attitudes:** Lastly, one respondent felt societal norms were a barrier, saying, "It is mainly their resistance to speak my language and attend the weekly language classes. The society in Australia does not value multilingualism."

The responses illustrate complex issues involving educational policies, social stigmas, and a lack of resources, among other challenges.

Summary: Multilingual Services

The accessibility and effectiveness of translation and interpreting services (TIS) garnered varied opinions from the community.

- **Privacy Concerns:** One individual said, "I think it's a numbers issue; the issue I have heard through my work is when a client knows the translator from their community and doesn't want their community to know that they are using a particular service."
- **Cost Factor:** Another respondent mentioned, "I think it is easy to find translators through Naati but it can be pricey."
- **Government Help:** This point was contrasted by someone who thought that "the Australian government offers a lot of help; many of their services are accessible in several languages."
- **Accessibility:** Some had issues with how easy it was to access these services. "Not easily accessible at all. No information was clear about where and how to get the service," one person reported.
- **Quality and Dialects:** A respondent brought up the point that "There are very few interpreting services focused on the western dialect (Pakistani) Pashto. Afghan Pashto is almost a different language, making it hard for many community members seeking services."





- **Teaching Context:** One person emphasised the importance of context in translation, saying, "This will be important to make them comprehend the meaning or context. As a result, they can move forward."
- **Professionalism:** Lastly, the need for high-quality professionals was stressed: "Quality is a major issue. We need to value these professionals, remunerate them as they deserve and consider translating and interpreting a fully-fledged profession."

The responses point to several areas that could be improved, such as privacy concerns, cost, and service quality, including dialect-specific needs.

Summary: Crisis Communication

Responses about the effectiveness of communication in native languages during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic were mixed, highlighting a variety of experiences and perspectives.

- **Language Assumptions:** One person pointed out a fundamental assumption: "There is an assumption here that my additional and heritage language is my native language and thus preferred language for communication, which it is not."
- **Quality Concerns:** A respondent stated, "Not so much. A lot of mistranslation," while another mentioned, "Quality was a major issue, and it is disappointing and disheartening."
- **Limited Resources:** One person who speaks Urdu and Pashto mentioned, "There was next to none for Urdu or Pashto. I created videos around mental health and well-being in Pashto to send around my community."
- **Online Solutions:** Interestingly, one participant found online translators to be helpful: "It was when we most speak in Spanish because as a family we were altogether most of the time. For the rest of the aspects, as we didn't have to go out of our house often, we could use translators from the internet."
- **Positive Changes:** A bright spot in the responses was, "Things seem to be improving as the pandemic brought to the surface many covert issues. There seems to be a lot more co-design in communication campaigns, and I am starting to see well-written resources."

The responses suggest that while some people did not face challenges due to fluency in English, others experienced significant issues with the quality and availability of information in their native or heritage languages. Improvements could focus on quality control and expanding the range of languages in which critical information is made available.

Summary: Overseas Comparison

When asked about what Australia could learn from other countries language policies, the responses showcased a variety of opinions and suggestions:

- **France's Teaching Approach:** One participant suggested, "They could teach languages 3 hours a week like in France rather than one hour. When teaching a second language, add





another 3 hours on top of the first one. Continuity and consistency are the keys to proper language teaching. Changing language every two years in schools does not help with any retention."

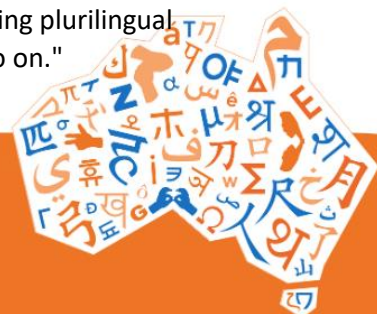
- **Migrant Languages:** A detailed response stated, "There are excellent language policies overseas: Switzerland, South Africa, Finland, Canada, Basque and Catalan regions in Spain... the issue is that these language policies focus on the official languages and they have solid policies to protect, foster language use, offer high-quality services in various languages, etc. but then, they are hopeless with migrant languages. We need a solid language policy in Australia."
- **Examples of Multilingual Policies:** Countries like Bolivia and Singapore were cited as having plurilingual policies that could be instructive for Australia.

The overarching sentiment appears to be that Australia has much to learn from other countries when it comes to language policies, whether it's the teaching methods employed in France or the comprehensive language policies in places like Switzerland and Canada. The challenge lies in balancing the preservation of native languages with the inclusion and support of migrant languages.

Summary: Linguistic Preservation and Promotion

Community members had various ideas on how to ensure the preservation and promotion of less commonly spoken languages in Australia:

- **Promotion and Diversity:** One person suggested "Promoting diversity everywhere" as a way to help preserve lesser-known languages.
- **Cultural Events:** Another participant noted, "Create language classes and cultural events to teach the language and customs. I do not believe that making it mandatory to teach a local indigenous language at school for political purposes is doing anything to help First Australians."
- **School Inclusion:** Several participants believe that incorporating these languages into the educational system is essential. One comment was, "Allow these languages as school subjects," while another mentioned, "Provide courses for school-age students despite the numbers."
- **Community Groups:** One person specifically mentioned the positive impact of groups like Multilingual Australia: "Create groups like Multilingual Australia, to promote fun activities to enhance especially kids to keep their mother tongue."
- **Government Funding:** The role of government was highlighted, with one participant saying, "I think it would all come down to government funding. It would be great if such communities could get funding to run activities that preserve and celebrate their language."
- **Educational Reform:** One respondent gave a comprehensive list: "Curriculum and relevant policy reform, resource materials development in many languages considering plurilingual speakers, teacher capacity development for multilingual instruction...and so on."





- **Community Resources:** The necessity for resources was emphasised: "The community needs resources for that (funding mainly) so that teachers can be trained, and language can be promoted and taught among the new generations."

The responses highlight the need for a multi-pronged approach involving schools, community groups, and government funding to preserve and promote lesser-known languages successfully.

Summary: Additional Comments on Language and Culture

The additional comments from community members offer personal insights into the complexities of linguistic identity and cultural integration:

- **Cultural Flexibility:** One person mentioned embracing a "nomadic" status. They said, "Sometimes I will do things the 'Australian way' and at other times, I will do them (cooking, for example, or how I discipline my kids) the Chilean way. I choose when I'm patriotic and when I'm not..."
- **Heritage vs Native Language:** Another individual pointed out that not everyone with a heritage language considers it their native language. They shared, "For myself, this meant my grandfather was reluctant to pass on German to our family, and I only studied it at university."
- **Artistic Expression:** One participant has been using theatre to champion artists from CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) backgrounds. They stated, "I was able to produce Australia's first Pashto language play through state funding and the support of The Blue Room theatre."
- **Educational Challenges:** From Nepal, one comment discussed the tension between teaching in English and preserving indigenous languages: "While I taught with the English language at secondary school, parents clearly used to share their expectations, but in the classroom, I could easily notice the level of low comprehension."
- **Professional Respect:** Another individual emphasised the importance of respecting multilingual skills in professional settings: "I don't appreciate when people comment or mock my accent when I speak in English... we need to value languages when professionals are engaged for new jobs and speaking other languages should be highly valued in any job application process."

These comments underline the diverse ways that people experience and navigate their multilingual identities, often shaped by personal, societal, and historical factors.





Appendix B- Libraries at the Heart of Language: Bridging the Multilingual Gap in Regional WA

Introduction

At Multilingual Australia, we actively embrace and celebrate the richness of language diversity. With a legacy stretching back to 2002, our mission has been to build an inclusive community where over 400 languages spoken in Australia – including 183 Indigenous languages and AUSLAN – are treasured and valued.

Recently, our second roundtable discussion, "Voices from the Countryside: Multilingualism in Rural Areas," delved into the vibrant language tapestry in rural regions. Conducted online through videoconferencing, this insightful event brought together key community stakeholders and leaders from Port Headland, Karratha, and Katanning. The roundtable not only consulted with these experts but also gathered survey feedback from the broader community, allowing us to craft this issue paper rooted in the voices and experiences of real people.

Our participants shared compelling stories of working with diverse communities and illuminated the unique challenges of nurturing and sustaining languages in rural and remote parts of Australia. Yet, it's vital to acknowledge a significant limitation of the roundtable: the unfortunate exclusion of AUSLAN or language interpreters due to budget constraints, despite clear requests from the community. This glaring omission underscores the very challenges we seek to address, highlighting the urgent need for greater accessibility and inclusivity in our continued efforts to foster multilingualism across Australia.

Key Challenges for Multilingual Communities in Rural Australia

Language is more than a mere tool for communication; it embodies the soul of a culture, tradition, and community. In the diverse and dynamic landscape of Western Australia (WA), many families and communities have roots in various linguistic traditions. However, regional areas of WA are experiencing a silent but profound struggle in preserving and maintaining languages, especially those not widely spoken in the broader community.

Libraries, as centres of learning and cultural exchange, have long played a pivotal role in supporting language preservation and enrichment. They offer books, resources, and a communal space where languages can be practised, celebrated, and passed down through generations. Yet, the reality is that many regional libraries lack the necessary resources to fulfil this essential role, especially when catering to multilingual families' needs.

This struggle is not just a concern for the families directly affected but resonates across the broader community. When a language is lost, or its practice is stifled, an invaluable part of our shared cultural heritage is diminished. The ensuing ripple effect impacts intergenerational language transmission, continuity of cultural traditions, and our multicultural fabric's richness.

Simultaneously, the increasing reliance on digital platforms to compensate for the lack of localised support has its limitations and drawbacks. While digital resources may offer some solutions, they





cannot replace the human touch and in-person interaction that are vital for nurturing language skills and cultural understanding.

The following sections will delve into the specific challenges and potential solutions, with the goal of charting a path forward that recognises the key roles libraries play in maintaining languages and how we can celebrate our linguistic diversity and strengthen our shared cultural heritage by enhancing their resources in rural and remote communities.

Lack of Language Resources in Libraries:

Libraries have always been the cornerstone of education, cultural exchange, and community engagement. In the multilingual context of regional WA, libraries are more than repositories of books; they are vital in preserving languages and providing tools for cultural connection. However, a stark reality is emerging in regional areas where there is a significant shortage of materials and resources to cater to the diverse linguistic needs of the community.

1. **Limited Availability of Multilingual Materials:** The libraries in regional WA often lack sufficient books, learning aids, and resources in languages other than English. This scarcity affects adults and children, depriving them of essential tools to learn and maintain their native language. A Ukrainian-speaking community professional lamented the situation: *"It's difficult to find even books in the language... they just had a few books in the library, had just a few books for children, and that's it."*
2. **Community's Desire for More Inclusive Resources:** The community's cry for more diverse language resources has been loud and clear.

The Taiwanese community leader expressed the collective wish: *"Even to start with the library, we just would like to have more books in other languages."*

Further adding to that, a Ukrainian-speaking community professional noted "It's much harder in regional Australia, for example, speaking about the Ukrainian language... Practising [the language] here in regional towns like [location]. Yeah, it's much more difficult because we don't have that many [people]," noted by the Ukrainian-speaking professional. A glaring void in multilingual resources, even in libraries, adds to the struggle. "Even to start with the library, we would like to have more books in other languages... [It is] very difficult to [even] keep learning English because people don't have classes here in [location]," she added.

However, when the capacity is there in the library, the outcomes can be significant for the families. A mother who requested Chinese storybooks for her child also shared, *"In our current local library, I requested Chinese storybooks for my child and received much support. While I have examined some online resources, I believe in-person interaction is superior to online browsing."*

Accessibility issues make the problem more multifaceted. As shared by a participant, "There are Chinese language programs in Perth, but accessibility is a barrier... There was a sizable Chinese community in the local government areas where we previously resided, and the local library had story time in Chinese. It was excellent, but we don't live there anymore."





As the Ukrainian-speaking mother noted, *"If you live in a regional town, you rely on online resources a lot... and it comes the same to the language... So just online pretty much which is not ideal but... Just have to adjust."*

Digital resources can't replace the in-person experience of browsing through books and interacting with the language in a tangible way. Taiwanese community leader commented: "People still prefer to go to school in person. With the physical materials and live conversations... it's not sustainable if they don't have the [right] environment."

4. **Potential Partnerships and Initiatives:** There is a glimmer of hope and opportunity in this challenging landscape. By partnering with ethnic community/language schools, local governments can work towards enhancing library resources. Collaborative efforts with community organisations and leveraging state-based services can also be promising pathways. Additionally, engaging with established networks such as the Country Women's Association (CWA) could further amplify these efforts. With a rich history of community service and a presence in many regional areas, the CWA has the potential to play a pivotal role.

The shortage of language resources in regional libraries is not merely an administrative issue; it's a cultural crisis. Without immediate and thoughtful intervention, we risk losing invaluable linguistic diversity and the rich tapestry of cultural heritage that it represents. The voices from the community have spoken, and they underscore the urgent need for action, inclusivity, and a renewed commitment to our multilingual heritage.

Moving Forward: Recommendations for Strengthening Multilingual Support in Regional WA

The challenges faced by regional WA in supporting and maintaining multilingualism are multifaceted but can be addressed through comprehensive initiatives and systemic changes. The following recommendations are offered to the WA Ministers and Department Heads:

1. **Community Education Funding:** Allocate funding within the Department of Communities and Dept of Local Government for community education, to enhance awareness among local communities of their multilingual neighbours' needs. This investment can lead to more cohesive communities that value and support linguistic diversity.
2. **Investigation of Multilingual Issues in Education:** Direct the Education Department of WA to investigate multilingual issues' role in regional student learning. It's vital to shift from a deficit model to one that makes multilingual students and parents part of the curriculum, thereby promoting an inclusive educational environment.
3. **Assessing/Surveying Teachers for Multilingual Skills:** Conduct assessments and surveys to identify teachers with multilingual skills. Utilise these skills as part of professional development, and consider creating regional placements specifically for multilingual





teaching staff. This targeted approach could be incorporated into professional development pathways, recognising the value of multilingual abilities in education.

4. **Partnership with Ethnic Communities/Language Schools:** Foster relationships with ethnic communities and language schools to make regional visits and integrate these elements into the curriculum.
5. **Non-Government Advocacy:** Engage with organisations such as the Country Women's Association to discuss how to support multilingual mothers and families in regional WA. Multilingual Australia would be able to provide support.
6. **State-Based Language Services:** Explore the creation of local state-based services where locals can charge for conversations with language communities, with the possibility of fees being supported by the Dept of Communities, Dept of Education, or Dept of Local Government or Federally by TIS/Home Affairs.
7. **Upgrade Access to Language Resources:** Work on improving access to language resources in public spaces like libraries. This could be done by increasing the availability of books and learning materials in languages other than English, thereby fostering a rich and diverse learning environment for all residents.
8. **Continuous Collaboration and Evaluation:** Maintain regular communication with community leaders, educators, and stakeholders, coupled with ongoing assessment of these initiatives, to ensure strategies remain effective and responsive. Multilingual Australia would be able to provide support to bring together stakeholders.





Multilingual Australia, operating since 2000, is dedicated to creating a language-friendly nation by promoting linguistic diversity. Australia is known for its cultural diversity, with over 22% of Australians speaking a language other than English at home. Over 400 languages are represented, including 183 Indigenous languages and AUSLAN. However, language maintenance and preservation remain pressing concerns.

In February 2023, Multilingual Australia organised a "Navigating Multiple Languages" roundtable discussion for multicultural, faith, and multilingual community members. The event aimed to provide a platform for people to share experiences, learn about language maintenance strategies and discuss barriers. Our goal is to present a narrative that is engaging, interesting, and easy to understand. We have used clear language and avoided jargon to make the paper more accessible.

The roundtable identified **three key themes** related to social cohesion:

- The personal cost of language loss
- The impact of bad language policies on families
- Australia's English-only language systems are out of step with the rest of the world

These findings have been summarised in a comprehensive paper intended to be a valuable resource for governments, policymakers, teachers, community leaders, and others interested in promoting linguistic diversity.

Key Challenges for Multilingual Families

The roundtable discussion identified several key challenges multilingual communities face in Australia, including the personal cost of language loss, the impact of insufficient language policies on families, and the consequences of a predominantly English-only (Monolingual) approach. Participants expressed concerns about the loss of identity, the undervaluation of language skills, and the need for more specific services for multilingual Australians. Proper language policies and support systems also contribute to cross-cultural conflicts and stress within diverse families.

Multilingual Australia calls for national leadership on language policies that foster social cohesion, cultural understanding, and linguistic diversity. Addressing these issues is crucial to ensure a more inclusive and harmonious future for all Australians.

The personal cost of language loss

Participants told Multilingual Australia that loss of language leads to loss of identity, making people and families very vulnerable. Their language skills are often undervalued and underutilised in their workplaces, school and in the home while they view it themselves as a strength.





Mental Health services are not reaching multilingual Australians in times of need, leading to experiences of grief and loss. Even less documented but regularly communicated to Multilingual Australia, silencing different languages is experienced as racism and bullying. This has implications for government services, youth and justice, mental health services, or even triaging in an emergency department.

- A mature-aged Polynesian woman lamented how parents experience the challenges of keeping their language alive and said, "Now, it's so sad, none of my kids can speak the Niuean language. I tried teaching my kids simple things they could understand. Language is your identity."
- A Bolivian woman who migrated to the US from Bolivia as a young child recalled her family's decision about language maintenance and its impact on her identity. "At 7, I started a new life in the US after moving from Bolivia. My father decided not to speak Spanish with me anymore; I left that culture. I didn't speak Spanish, and this wasn't easy. It felt like a punishment.
- An Indian mother living extensively in different countries said, "It's not just for your identity. It gives you a lens to look at other cultures from another perspective and question your own ideas and philosophies, which helps you better understand the community you're engaging with, at least for me. Especially in schools, to see the different perspectives and to work together. I love that.
- A Salvadorian woman shared her story of coming to Australia with her family and stressed, "It's essential to be able to speak Spanish. I was very glad we were able to maintain the language for over 30 years. My parents did that for us. It wasn't a punishment. We wanted to do it.
- A mature-aged Vietnamese woman who has been living in Australia for many years shared her experience with her children, "I spoke Vietnamese with them, but when they were 6 or 7 years old, at Kindy and Primary, they started speaking English. They didn't want to speak Vietnamese anymore. They didn't want to."
- Despite the initial resistance, this Vietnamese mother's efforts paid off in the long run. Her daughter, now a nurse, expressed gratitude for being forced to learn Vietnamese. She recounted her daughter's comments, "Mum, I know you forced us, and we didn't like it, but I would like to say thank you for forcing us to learn Vietnamese." Whilst her language skills enabled her to connect with patients directly and provide translation services from Vietnamese to English, it is important to recognise that, like many other bilingual and multilingual Australians, she did not get officially recognised nor compensated for these very valuable language skills.
- The issue of silencing different languages is still prevalent, as it is often experienced as racism and bullying. A mature-aged Indian woman and active community leader observed, "The ABC [The Australian Broadcasting Commission] could do more work. They have added more



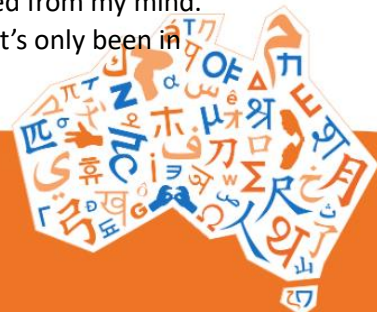


- An Arabic-speaking primary carer from North Africa pointed out that Australia doesn't discourage teaching children multiple languages, but the system's focus on English can be intimidating. "They want your kids to learn English simply. They [Schools] want you to have native English only, which is bullying; it's incorrect. [English systems] want the kids to learn English, and parents want a better life for their children, so they don't speak the heritage languages. They can be successful as bilinguals, but parents often don't have the knowledge, key information [to maintain their language]." He also added that "...my children do have a connection to their cultural heritage. They have an identity. They consider themselves to be North African. They are whiter than white but think of themselves like that."
- A mature-aged man of mixed heritage (Indian Chinese) explained that his parents' decision to prioritise English was driven by a desire to protect their children from racism and help them fit in. "Don't blame my parents," he said, "They were trying to protect us from racism and fear, trying to help us fit in."
- A Bolivian woman who migrated to the US from Bolivia shared a similar sentiment. "I remember my father said to me to start speaking English early so I'd have no accent," she recounted. "He was very conscious of his Spanish accent"
- In some cases, parents might feel guilty about not providing their children with a strong foundation in their native language. One parent who enrolled her child in Arabic school expressed her concern, "They call each other names in Arabic only, then when they become teenagers, they will feel the bitterness that they don't have the language. Maybe they will blame me. I feel guilty."

Bad language policies are stressing families.

Further discussion highlighted the crucial role languages play in holding together migrant families' memories and identity and how multilingual households demonstrate increased resilience. Despite these strengths, the absence of proper language policies and support takes a toll on families, often resulting in cross-cultural marital and family conflicts. The stories shared by participants underscore the need for comprehensive language policies and support systems to foster harmony and alleviate stress within diverse family units.

- A mature-aged Indian community leader expressed her concern about language loss in her own family: "My eldest son can speak Punjabi fluently, but my youngest can't. He had not picked up any Punjabi. He can understand, but he never replies back in Punjabi."
- A Bolivian woman who migrated to the US as a child shared a similar experience: "When we returned to Bolivia, we still spoke English. Spanish was completely eradicated from my mind. It only resurfaced in my life later. Meeting people from my background. That's only been in





the last 2 years, and I've been here such a long time now. Language is part of my identity. I need to get back to my roots."

- An Indian mother living in different countries found a creative solution to help her children maintain their language: "I put my kids in a Hindi theatre, where they may not understand the exact meaning of all the words, but with theatre and acting, they learn through their actions the meanings. They are learning all the Hindi authors. They're not only gaining in confidence, but they feel very comfortable to express themselves." She also mentioned the challenges of incorporating additional languages into the Australian school system: "We brought Hindi into WA's schooling system, but adaptation, making that work at a young age, is really difficult to explain to a school board and explaining why a second language is useful."
- A Salvadorian woman shared her family's success in maintaining their native language: "I came here when I was four years old. I only spoke Spanish. Went to school. At school, we got helped a lot at school. My parents were strict. At home, you spoke Spanish. I just did it. It just flowed. When my sister was born here, it was exactly the same story. She spoke Spanish. If that hadn't happened, I would have lost [my language skills]. On the other hand, my cousins refused to speak Spanish, and the parents only spoke to them in English."
- An Arabic-speaking father who was the primary carer of his children reflected on their language learning experiences: "My lack of organisation came from myself. My wife supported me. We think now that each parent speaking in a different language would have been a good way to do it."
- A mature-aged woman of Indian heritage who has lived in Perth for over a decade reflected on intergenerational loss. She observed that "I can relate to [losing my language]. I've seen a transition with my grandparents. They spoke a language called Multani in Pakistan. Nobody could speak it to me when my grandparents passed away, so I lost that language."
- The lack of language policies and support can contribute to cross-cultural marital and family conflicts, as demonstrated by stories from a participant.
- A Bolivian woman shared her experience, "When I got married, I learnt my husband's language, Portuguese... I got so good at that, and it was so easy. I thought to myself, and I need to go back and speak Spanish. When you're young, and the language goes, it gets taken away from you; you can lose it forever."
- A member of the Vietnamese community said, "I have friends who got married to Australian men... one of my friends' children only speak English with their Dad... She [the wife's mother and grandmother] lives here and cooks. She says "ready", the kids come out from their rooms to eat and then go back into their rooms without speaking to her. It's Sad." This example illustrates the impact of language loss on family dynamics and the ability to care for elderly relatives.
- An Arabic-speaking father expressed regret, "I have a sad experience... I was her primary carer, and I spoke to her mainly in Arabic... by 2008, I lost it and stopped speaking to her in Arabic and spoke to everyone in English, speaking only English." This quote emphasises the





- An Urdu-speaking man commented, "Some kids have a flair for languages... we always spoke Urdu... but didn't speak it with my ex-wife. Culturally, she was Burmese... The kids went to School here, picked up English easily and are just like Aussies today." He also added I remarried to a woman who also speaks Urdu, I could pick that up very easily. The first wife was Christian, and the second was Muslim. Religion also plays a big part. What's happening in India now is difficult."

Australia's English-only language policies are out of step with the rest of the world.

Australia's insistence on a monolingual (English-only) education system has profoundly impacted families, with many feeling the strain of generational disconnect and loss of cultural heritage. Local communities are increasingly vocal in their calls for national leadership on language policies, recognising that linguistic diversity is crucial in fostering social cohesion and cultural understanding. However, geopolitical hotspots often prioritise existing language needs in Australia, leading to a neglect of the vast linguistic resources present within its multicultural society. It is essential to address these issues to ensure a more inclusive and harmonious future for all Australians.

- A mature-aged Indian woman discussed the changing sentiments towards language, saying, "There's a push to bring Punjabi into WA. Before, it was Mandarin. The sentiment in the diaspora changes. Sometimes, a very dangerous sentiment can inhibit language development."
- A Bolivian woman emphasised the importance of recognising the value of additional languages, stating, "Going into the future, in school, teachers need to see that additional languages are a gift and not a problem'. Different languages in books will help because kids don't know what they don't know. Kids need to be empowered to value languages."
- An Indian mother and professional suggested looking to Canada as an example, explaining, "Australia can look to Canada. The Canadian Government does a lot of the policies. They celebrate days. In Canada, we've got multiple schools teaching multiple languages....The curriculum is the same for everyone, but the classes are conducted in different languages. How seriously the government takes that, keeps having good policies in place, informs the decision the schools are taking, and in the home, it's amazing to see the effects on the community."
- An Arabic-speaking father who was the primary carer of his children emphasised personal determination in maintaining languages, saying, "There's lots of opportunity to maintain the language, but it's people's decision. So, if they aren't determined to keep the language going with their kids, then they won't. Yes, harassment from school makes it harder, but with technology and social media today, it is easier than before to keep it going. Most people have the intention to keep their language going."
- Local communities are voicing their desire for national leadership on language policies. A Salvadorian woman emphasised the importance of preserving languages for maintaining identity, stating, "So important because of time, era, and policies. It's an opportunity to





preserve and protect our languages. This is important to maintain my identity, being able to speak with our relatives."

- A mature-aged Indian woman and active community leader added, " Our experience with the loss of Aboriginal languages is that we are not going to lose any more languages in Australia. We can't. Australia doesn't need to spend more time to learn that point."
- This community leader also highlighted the need for top-down policies and national support for local government initiatives, saying, " The top-down policies are very important. Some great work is going on in local governments. The City of Canning in WA had a sudden influx in CaLD communities. They did work collaboratively with the community to create a local intercultural community centre. What they did was community consultation with different cultural and language groups. Gave a sense of belonging to different groups."
- A Bolivian woman who migrated to the US from Bolivia as a young child also expressed the need for national leadership, stating, "Put real effort and resources in. The library has signs in different languages. The local council can do a lot more to help with this."
- The community leader criticised tokenism, saying, "Tokenism only celebrates in pictures; politicians always try to get leverage with these images for their social media, that's becoming more and more common but doesn't do anything."
- A Bolivian woman emphasised the need for national support in helping future generations, stating, "If I started a new family and were receiving information about prenatal education, languages, identity, that would help me look towards the future. We can do and need to do much work to help that future."
- A Salvadorian woman highlighted the changing demographics in Australia, suggesting a need for inclusive language policies, while another Salvadorian woman called for more multicultural events.
- A mature-aged Polynesian woman echoed this sentiment, saying, "We need more multicultural events. Dances, culture, anything. We try to do it with our Polynesian and Pacific communities. We sing songs even if we don't understand each other's languages."
- Local communities continue to express their desire for national leadership on language policies. A mature-aged Indian woman and active community leader pointed out the importance of not only spoken language but also written language, stating, "Written language versus spoken is an issue too. Spanish script is the same as English. 'Majority language' has much impact. If the written script is different from the 'Majority language', then he wouldn't be able to read Hindi anymore. If the kids read the dialogue in Hindi, but not only speaking but also reading the script, they will retain that. I may lose my Hindi script when I'm writing letters/emails in English. Lose the literature, and you lose the perspective. If you have the script, you can still read the language."
- Geopolitical hotspots often take priority over existing language needs in Australia, leaving some communities feeling neglected. An Indian mother who lived extensively in different countries stated, "Location matters too and proximity. It's like Vietnam being closer while other places languages are further away to visit. We need to learn from places like Canada"





and how to undo some of the damage we have done to ourselves." This sentiment reflects the importance of considering all language communities, regardless of their geographical proximity.

- A mature-aged Indian woman and active community leader added, "India – time-specific issues, language needs to be preserved - especially during difficult times when the language is under threat, during the transition, that's when we need to have a look at what is important, what identity we want to maintain." She also noted the danger of people splitting into nationalist groups, emphasising the importance of policies that support language preservation and multiculturalism.
- A Salvadorian woman shared her concerns about the decline of certain cultures within the same language group, saying, "I'm finding that our culture from El Salvador is falling back, maybe different stages, dying out. The category of Latin American or "Spanish speakers "doesn't talk about the different countries and cultures we have. We used to be quite active in the community, and that's dropped off too. New Latin American communities and their cultures are growing, whilst ours is not."





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About Multilingual Australia

Multilingual Australia, previously known as Bilingual Families Perth, is a not-for-profit organisation that has been supporting families from diverse linguistic backgrounds since 2002. Our mission is to identify and address the needs of children, parents, and grandparents of non-English speaking backgrounds in relation to the maintenance and usage of languages other than English at home.

Multilingualism is a valuable asset for individuals and society as a whole, and we strive to promote its benefits.

Our focus is on encouraging families to confidently use a language other than English for communication within the family. Our organisation helps families overcome the barriers that may prevent them from using their native languages at home, such as a lack of confidence or resources.

While our initial focus was on families with very young children, we now welcome children and family members of all ages. We also advocate for multilingualism in the broader community, raising awareness about the benefits of multilingualism and the importance of linguistic diversity.

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