

May 2025

# Multicultural Communities Snapshot Report



## Our engagement with multicultural communities

As the National Youth Mental Health Foundation with a network of more than 160 centres across the country, headspace supports young people aged 12 to 25 years in Australia with their individual mental health, physical health, and sexual health needs. With its model of care focused on holistic support, headspace also provides alcohol and other drug support services and work and study support. The community we serve is as diverse as the Australian population. In this snapshot report, we shine a light on access to and experiences of headspace services by multicultural young people and showcase the cultural diversity of headspace staff.

This report shows that over the past five years there has been a steady increase in multicultural young people accessing headspace centre services. This indicates improvement compared to an earlier report finding that headspace centre services were not sufficiently attracting young people from multicultural backgrounds (KPMG, 2022).

Young people from diverse multicultural backgrounds have similar presenting issues, experiences and outcomes from accessing headspace centre services compared with young people who are not multicultural, although there are some differences indicated that require further investigation.

The headspace Multicultural Practice Team is working to better understand the needs of multicultural young people, and to support and drive culturally responsive approaches and practices across headspace National and the headspace Network.

# Background:

## Reporting on multicultural communities

### Reporting standards

At headspace, regular reporting on multicultural communities means reporting on Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) young people. This is based on a commonly used definition that aggregates information on country of birth and language spoken at home (AIHW, 2022) and includes young people born outside of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Scotland, Wales and the USA and those who speak a language other than English or an Indigenous language of Australia at home. The same definition is used in aged care and disability reporting (AIHW, 2021; NDIS, 2019) and was recommended by researchers based on a systematic review of 108 Australian epidemiologic studies (Pham et al, 2021).

The two underlying variables are part of a set of four 'core variables' defined in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Standards for Statistics on Cultural and Language Diversity (the Standards) (ABS, 2022). The Standards provide a nationally consistent framework for the collection and dissemination of data on cultural and language diversity in Australia and are regularly updated, including the addition of a broader set of indicators representing cultural identity and ancestry. The ABS makes no recommendation for how these data should be used as this should depend on the organisational purposes (ABS, 2022). At headspace, we follow the recommendation from the literature (Pham et al., 2021) to enable comparison with other Australian datasets.



### The headspace Minimum Data Set

Like other health organisations, headspace maintains and updates comprehensive Minimum Data Sets (MDS) for all our programs. The first headspace MDS was introduced to primary centres in 2013 and is collected through the hAPI data collection system (more on how data collection works is included under 'Methods & Definitions' at the end of this report). Since service commencement, headspace has always collected data on country of birth and language spoken at home, the two variables required to report on the CALD definition.

In 2019, a review of our data collection and reporting practices introduced a new data item, the young person's ethnicity. Ethnicity represents a self-identified attachment or affiliation with a specific cultural group. Even though not featured in the broader set of variables included in the ABS Standards, the ethnicity concept connects to a different ABS classification, the ABS Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ABS, 2019). This allows us to group young people who self-identify with an ethnicity other than Australian/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander into broad cultural and ethnic groups to provide insight into the headspace experience of different cultural and ethnic groups.



# This snapshot report

For this report, we consider all cultural background variables that headspace collects and expand on the CALD definition to include ethnicity as a defining element of multiculturalism. This allows us to look at the data through different lenses:



## Multicultural young people

When we talk about multicultural young people, we refer to any young person who: identifies with an ethnicity that is not Australian, First Nations Australian or the dominant ethnicity of other main English-speaking countries; was born in a country that is not a main English-speaking country; and/or speaks a language other than English or an Indigenous Language of Australia at home. This is the broadest, most inclusive perspective we can take on multiculturalism.



## CALD People

One step narrower is the CALD lens. When we talk about CALD young people, we refer to any young person who was born in a country that is not a main English-speaking country and/or speaks a language other than English or an Indigenous Language of Australia at home. This is a subset of multicultural young people as it removes ethnicity from the definition.



## First generation multicultural young people

Lastly, we also talk about first generation multicultural young people. This is a further subset of multicultural/CALD young people as it removes language from the definition and requires the young person to be born outside of Australia and other main English-speaking countries.<sup>1</sup>

Through these different lenses, we analysed headspace data from five financial years, starting from financial year 2019/2020 up until the end of financial year 2023/2024. Unless indicated otherwise, statistics refer to the five-year period.



1. Table 2 in the 'Methods & Definitions' section at the end lists all formal data definitions we refer to in this document.

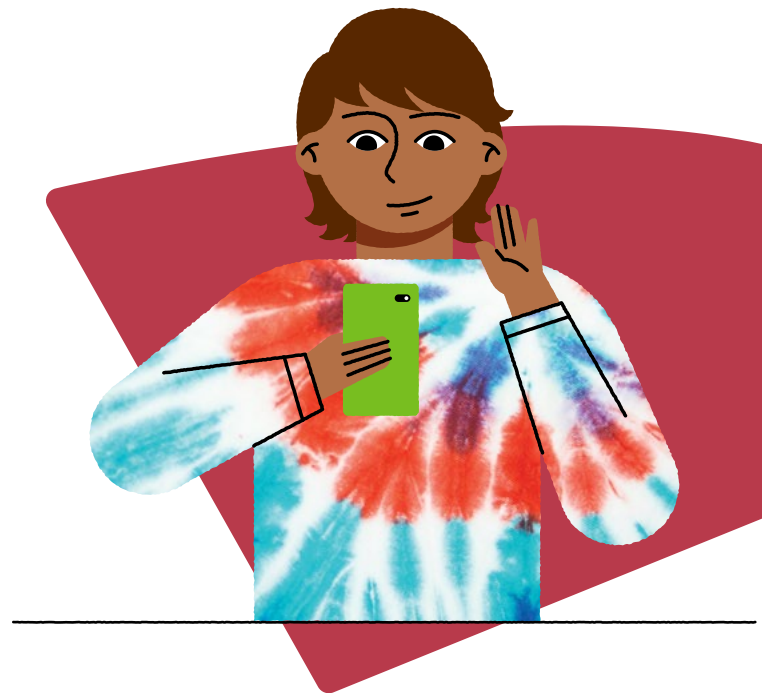


## How multicultural are the young people accessing headspace?

Over the last five years, headspace has seen a steady increase in service access by multicultural young people, CALD young people, and first generation multicultural young people (Table 1). This includes the number and proportion of multicultural, CALD, or first generation multicultural young people accessing headspace services, as well as the number and proportion of occasions of services provided to them. The table below shows the service access rates of multicultural, CALD, and first generation multicultural young people from FY 2019/20 to FY 2023/24.

In the most recent data from financial year 2023/2024, 23 per cent (17,446) of young people accessing services at headspace were multicultural; 12 per cent (9,241) had a culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) background: 5 per cent (4,108) were first generation multicultural, having been born outside of Australia or another main English-speaking country. Multicultural young people accessed 106,062 occasions of service.

Compared to 2019/2020, the service access rate for multicultural young people increased by over 20 per cent (24% relative increase for occasions of service; 21% relative increase for serviced young people), and this was similar for CALD young people and first generation multicultural young people.



### Service access rates of multicultural, CALD, and first generation multicultural young people from FY 2019/20 to FY 2023/24

Measure of service access		FY 2019/20	FY 2020/21	FY 2021/22	FY 2022/23	FY 2023/24
<b>Multicultural young people</b>	Serviced young people	18.8% (14,841)	19.7% (16,847)	21.3% (16,700)	22.5% (17,421)	22.7% (17,446)
	Occasions of service	18.6% (71,399)	19.8% (82,330)	22.0% (83,433)	23.1% (89,582)	23.1% (106,062)
<b>CALD Young people</b>	Serviced young people	9.8% (8,349)	10.2% (8,979)	11.0% (8,763)	11.8% (9,230)	11.9% (9,241)
	Occasions of service	10.1% (39,743)	10.6% (44,688)	11.8% (45,079)	12.3% (48,103)	12.3% (56,474)
<b>First generation multicultural</b>	Serviced young people	4.6% (3,611)	4.5% (3,868)	4.8% (3,765)	5.2% (4,012)	5.4% (4,108)
	Occasions of service	4.3% (16,310)	4.5% (18,538)	4.9% (18,767)	5.2% (19,986)	5.3% (24,444)

**Table 1.** Service access rates of multicultural, CALD, and first generation multicultural young people.

## Where do our multicultural young people come from?

Multicultural young people at headspace come from or identify with ethnicities from all corners of the world. Using the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ABS 2019), Southern and Eastern European make up the largest broad cultural and ethnic group of multicultural young people at headspace (23%), followed by South-East Asian (16%) and Oceanian (13%). Southern and Central Asian, North-East Asian, North African and Middle Eastern, and North-West European are all represented with around 10 per cent of the multicultural young people, while Sub-Saharan African (5%) and Peoples of the Americas (4%) are the smallest broad cultural and ethnic groups at headspace.

Since 2019/20, headspace has seen a slight shift in which multicultural groups have accessed our services: Asian and North African and Middle Eastern groups have seen relative increases in the number of services accessed, while Oceanian and European groups have seen relative decreases; groups from Sub-Saharan Africa and the Americas have remained relatively stable.

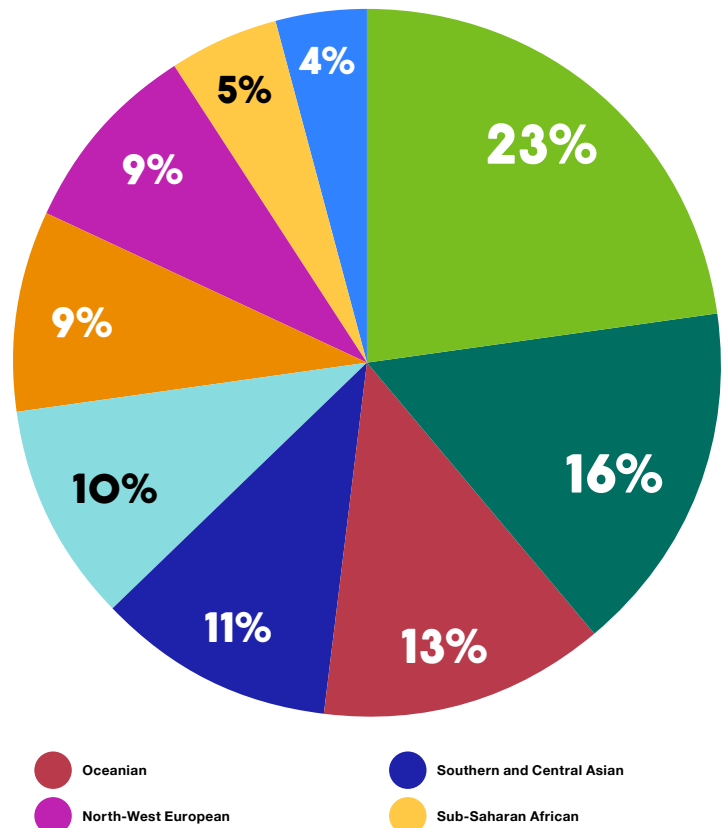


Figure 1. Representation of broad ethnic groups among multicultural young people.

## The top 5 countries of birth for first generation multicultural young people at headspace are:



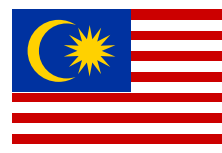
#1 Philippines  
**12%**



#2 India  
**9%**



#3 China  
**6%**



#4 Malaysia  
**3%**



#5 Thailand  
**3%**

**50%**

of the multicultural young people using headspace services speak a language other than English at home.

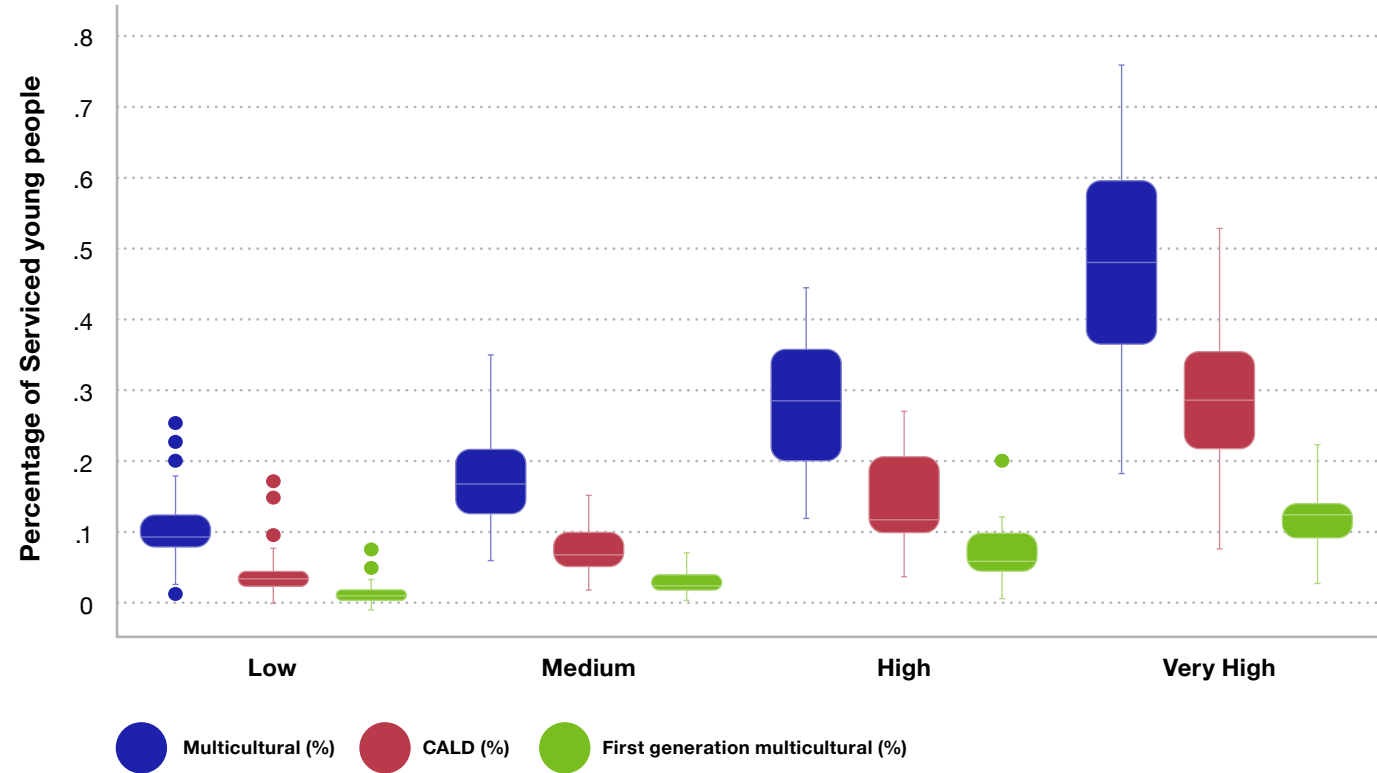
For CALD young people, **90%** speak a language other than English at home.

# Geographical distribution

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2023), most permanent migrants live in capital cities, with a majority living in Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne. This is also reflected in our headspace data. Four in five multicultural young people (79%) using headspace services live in a major city of Australia, compared to just over half (53%) of non-multicultural young people using headspace services. headspace centres in Victoria and New South Wales have the highest representation of multicultural young people.

Across the headspace centre network, there is a large spread in the percentage of young people who are multicultural, with up to 76 per cent of young people using one centre identifying as multicultural. Figure 2 represents the spread in percentages of multicultural and CALD young people recorded across the network, grouped according to the percentage of CALD young people in the centres ABS Statistical Area (based on SA3 in regional areas and SA4 in metro areas).

In areas where the population is less culturally diverse (less than 10% CALD; Low category), headspace centres see up to 26 per cent multicultural young people, up to 17 per cent CALD young people, and up to 8 per cent first generation multicultural young people. In contrast, in centres in the most culturally diverse areas (with 30% or more CALD young people; Very High category), up to 76 per cent are multicultural, up to 53 per cent are CALD, and up to 23 per cent are first generation multicultural young people.



**Figure 2.** Spread in percentage of Serviced Young People across the centre network, grouped by the percentage of CALD young people in the general population (Low: less than 10%; Medium: 10-19%; High: 20-29%; Very High: 30% or more), FY 2023/24.

## Characteristics of multicultural young people

Like the general headspace service user population, the majority of multicultural young people are female (65%), 30 per cent are male, and 5 per cent identify as gender diverse. There are 26 per cent who identify as LGBTIQ+. Of the multicultural people using headspace services, 5 per cent also identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Multicultural young people, and specifically those from CALD backgrounds, seek help a little later than the non-multicultural headspace service user population. On average, multicultural young people are 6 months older (about 17 years) when they start their first episode of care. After accounting for differences in age, multicultural young people are more likely engaged in full-time study and less likely to be employed than non-multicultural young people.

When they present to headspace, multicultural young people present with the same top 10 presenting issues as non-multicultural young people. Anxiety symptoms and depressive symptoms together make up more than half of presenting issues. They also present similarly on clinical measures, with an average MyLifeTracker score of 49, an average K10 of 30, and an average SOFAS score of 65.

## Services and outcomes for multicultural young people

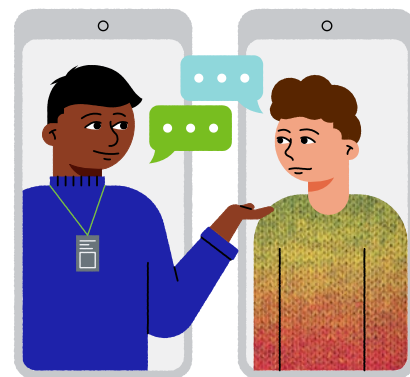
Multicultural young people access a similar number of services at headspace as other young people. The average number of sessions is 5 (with a median of 3 sessions) for multicultural, CALD and first generation multicultural young people.

Group services and services with family present are slightly less common among multicultural young people. For multicultural young people, 1 in 33 services is a group service (compared to 1 in 25 for non-multicultural young people), and 1 in 13 services are with family present (compared to 1 in 10 for non-multicultural young people). They also report less often that a family member influenced them to come (27% compared to 34% of non-multicultural young people).

Part of this is due to their slightly older age, but a gap in family involvement remains when age is accounted for. Without further information, it is not possible to determine what might be behind this relatively small difference. Potential reasons could include family being overseas, family experiencing language or other access barriers, a preference for support from extended community networks instead of family, not wanting to burden family, or mental health stigma experienced in different cultural communities.

At the end of an episode of care, two thirds of multicultural young people achieve a significant improvement<sup>2</sup> in at least one outcome measure, with 38 per cent experiencing lower psychological distress (K10), 41 per cent improving in their social and occupational functioning (SOFAS), and 52 per cent reporting a better quality of life (MyLifeTracker). These outcomes are comparable to those of the broader headspace population.

Multicultural young people rate their headspace service and session experience (My headspace Experience) consistently positively, similar to non-multicultural headspace users, with rating averages changing from 7.5 after their first headspace session to 7.9 before their last headspace session.<sup>3</sup> Qualitative feedback from a post care follow-up survey run in 2024 underscores an overall positive experience for multicultural/CALD young people accessing headspace services.



**Outcome measures contained in the report include:**

- **K10** 10-item self-report Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler et al., 2002)
- **MyLifeTracker** 5-item self-report quality of life measure (Kwan et al., 2018)
- **SOFAS** 1-item Social and Occupational Functional Assessment Scale (Goldman et al., 1992), assessed by service providers
- **My headspace Experience** 5-item self-report measure of session experience at youth mental health services (Rickwood et al., 2023)

### In the words of multicultural and CALD young people:

“I must thank headspace for being the first mental health providers to provide me with culturally and linguistically diverse mental healthcare. Before engaging with headspace, I was sceptical of whether mental healthcare providers could help me. After receiving mental healthcare from someone from a similar background to me, I genuinely believe in the power of mental health services like headspace.”

**CALD young person**  
Male, Age 24-25, VIC

“I attended headspace for several years until I aged out of the service. It was my safe space to talk. My favourite thing, coming from a CALD background and seeking support in an area that didn’t have many ethnic backgrounds, they never discriminated against me. They were always open to learning. The support they provided always aligned with my beliefs.”

**CALD young person**  
Female, Age 21-23, NSW

2. ‘Significant improvement’ denotes an improvement from first to last measurement of at least half a standard deviation, a moderate effect size in statistical terms.

3. The My headspace Experience rating scale goes from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) and covers five dimensions of service session experience: willingness to be at headspace; feeling listened to and understood; working on issues important to the young person; feeling hopeful for the future; and feeling that things are improving (Rickwood et al., 2023).



## headspace centre staff are multicultural

There is a wide range of cultural diversity among staff across the headspace network. In financial year 2023/2024, one third of the over 3,000 headspace centre service providers were multicultural (as in the above definition), with 21 per cent being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (CALD). One in five service providers reported speaking a language other than English either at home and/or being proficient in another language in a work context. Across all headspace services, the highest number were born in Hong Kong or China (69 or 2%), 68 in India (2%), 25 in Malaysia (1%) and 20 in Singapore (1%).

Multicultural young people report a slightly better headspace experience when being treated by a multicultural staff member, rating their service session with a multicultural staff member +0.05 points higher (My headspace Experience), whereas non-multicultural young people rate their service session with a non-multicultural staff member +0.05 points higher on the 10-point scale.



## Where to from here?

This analysis was part of an internal project (conducted by the Evaluation & Monitoring Team and the Multicultural Practice Team) to better understand the services for multicultural young people and their experience at headspace. The Multicultural Practice Team was established in 2022 to support and drive culturally responsive approaches and practices across headspace National and the headspace Network.

They work to support multicultural young people, communities and staff and help embed culturally responsive practice into different aspects of headspace services. The Team is using insights gained from this project to inform projects and advocate for more support to headspace services in their work with multicultural young people and communities.



# Methods & Definitions

Data were collected from young people and service providers via hAPI. hAPI is the headspace data collection platform that is used to collect the headspace MDS from young people and service providers. Data is collected at each occasion of service from the young person and the service provider, and the items vary according to the young person's visit number.

Demographic variables including ethnicity, country of birth and language spoken at home, are collected at the first visit. Service providers enter their own demographic data on commencement with headspace.

Relevant to this report are service provider country of birth, ethnicity, language spoken at home and proficiency in a language other than English in a work context.

Statistical analyses included (group-specific) descriptive statistics and frequencies, chi-squared tests of group differences across years, controlled linear regression and logistic regression. All reported differences and results are statistically significant with  $p < 0.05$ .

It is important to note that the analysis was focused on headspace clients in the headspace primary program (centres) and limited to young people who provided the demographic information necessary to determine their multicultural or CALD status.

Use of the data is covered by the consent provided by young people and service providers when they fill out their surveys. The general process of collecting data from young people was reviewed and endorsed by an independent body, the Australasian Human Research Ethics Consultancy Services. The dataset included 2,026,262 occasions of service delivered by 8,357 service providers to 264,724 young people.

This excluded approximately 18 per cent of the full population of headspace service users. Further limitations of our data are the limited ability to distinguish between different generations of migrants and the lack of data on dimensions of wellbeing that may be especially relevant to multicultural young people, such as cultural wellbeing or perceived stigma in the community. Further research is needed to better understand some of the differences in service access between multicultural young people and others.

## Definition of terminology

term	meaning	definition
<b>Multicultural</b>	The young person identifies with an ethnicity and/or has a cultural and linguistic background that is diverse from the dominant culture within Australia	<p>A young person who either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies with an ethnicity that is not Australian, First Nations Australian or the dominant ethnicity of other main English-speaking countries, and/or</li> <li>Is born in a country that is not a main English-speaking country (i.e. outside of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Scotland, Wales or USA), and/or</li> <li>Speaks a language other than English or an Indigenous Language of Australia at home</li> </ul> <p>The young person identifies with an ethnicity and/or has a cultural and linguistic background that is diverse from the dominant culture within Australia.</p>
<b>Broad cultural and ethnic groups</b>	The cultural and ethnic group a multicultural young person belongs to based on their self-identified ethnicity	Based on the Australian Standard Classification of Cultural and Ethnic Groups (ABS 2019), multicultural young people are grouped into nine broad cultural and ethnic groups (Oceania, North-West European, Southern and Eastern European, North African and Middle Eastern, South-East Asian, North-East Asian, Southern and Central Asian, Peoples of the Americas, Sub-Saharan African).
<b>Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)</b>	The young person has a cultural and linguistic background that is diverse from the dominant culture within Australia	<p>A young person who is either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Born in a country that is not a main English-speaking country (i.e. outside of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Scotland, Wales or USA), and/or</li> <li>Speaks a language other than 'English' or an 'Indigenous Language of Australia' at home</li> </ul> <p>The young person has a background that is culturally and linguistically diverse from the dominant culture within Australia.</p>
<b>First generation multicultural</b>	The young person was born outside of Australia or a main English-speaking country	A young person who was born in a country that is not a main English-speaking country (i.e. outside of Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, Scotland, Wales or USA).

Table 2. Definition of terminology.

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headspace centres and services operate across Australia, in metro, regional and rural areas, supporting young Australians and their families to be mentally healthy and engaged in their communities.



headspace would like to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First People and Traditional Custodians. We value their cultures, identities, and continuing connection to country, waters, kin and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and are committed to making a positive contribution to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, by providing services that are welcoming, safe, culturally appropriate and inclusive.



headspace is committed to embracing diversity and eliminating all forms of discrimination in the provision of health services. headspace welcomes all people irrespective of ethnicity, lifestyle choice, faith, sexual orientation and gender identity.



**headspace**  
National Youth Mental Health Foundation