

2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission

January 2026

Introduction

About SSI

Settlement Services International (SSI) is a large not-for-profit organisation dedicated to creating a more inclusive society in which everyone can meaningfully contribute to social, cultural, civic and economic life.

SSI was founded in Sydney in 2000 with the aim of helping newly arrived refugees settle in Australia. Over time, our expertise in working with people from diverse cultural and linguistic (CALD) backgrounds served as the foundation for a gradual expansion into other social services and geographical areas.

In 2018, SSI merged with Queensland-based Access Community Services, and opened an office in Victoria providing an extensive footprint across the eastern coast of Australia. In 2024-25, SSI supported more than 53,000 people across almost 60 programs nationally. In addition to supporting individuals and communities through the services we provide, SSI seeks to influence the systems, laws and policies that result in inequities and limit opportunities. SSI is an impact-focused organisation, whose Impact Strategy sets out our goals for an equitable, resilient, enriched, and inclusive Australia where our clients fully participate in the economic, social, civic, and cultural life.

About SSI's submission

SSI welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the 2026-27 Australian Government Pre-Budget process. In this submission, SSI puts forward six proposals for reforms and new areas of investment over the forward estimates. Our proposals align with the Australian Government's policy priorities and commitments to:

- implement Activate Australia's Skills' solutions to boost productivity, reduce class sizes, shorten waiting lists and improve essential services by improving Australia's overseas skills and qualifications recognition system;
- Improve the capacity of regional Australia to retain skilled migrant workers;
- Ensure that Workforce Australia is reformed to provide better employment support through specialised support streams to priority cohort populations such as refugees, migrants and young people;
- Review and potentially better target the Newly Arrived Resident Waiting Period (NARWP) so that the social and economic impacts of new permanent residents can be better recognised and shared;
- Build multicultural communities and organisations' capacity for the prevention and early intervention of domestic, family and sexual violence; and
- Start implementing the National Anti-Racism Framework.

The 2026-27 Budget presents an opportunity to leverage and strengthen Australia's multicultural character, and bolster social cohesion, as highlighted by the Multicultural Framework Review. SSI's five Budget proposals, summarised in the table below and detailed in the following pages, all advance that Review's core principles of connection, identity, belonging and inclusion:

| Proposal | Description | Page |
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| 1. Implement Activate Australia's Skills' solutions to make Australia's skills-recognition system faster, fairer and more affordable | <p>Solution 1 - Skills Recognition or Labour Mobility Commissioner: One national governance framework for all overseas skills and qualifications recognition, supported by an independent Commissioner/Ombudsman with regulatory powers to ensure efficiency, fairness, affordability and accountability.</p> <p>Solution 2 - Skills Recognition Grants: Financial support to individuals, removing cost barriers that hold them back from going through the skills and qualifications recognition process.</p> | 4 |

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| | <p>Solution 3 - National skills recognition portal: National online portal (a one-stop-shop) that provides clear, integrated information on how to get skills and qualifications recognised in certain states/territories and professions, with referrals to services to provide appropriate support.</p> <p>Solution 4 – Career Gateway Hubs: Place-based, integrated employment hubs with broad eligibility and specialist skills recognition navigators to guide migrants through the recognition and licensing process and connect qualified workers with roles that match their skills.</p> | |
| 2. Reform Workforce Australia through Specialised Employment Streams | Move away from a one-size-fits-all approach in employment services and instead establish Specialised Employment support Streams that cater to the unique needs of specific cohorts such as refugees, migrants, youth, and individuals facing complex barriers. | 7 |
| 3. Unlock regional migration through the STAY Solution – A flexible, subsidised regional employment retention model | Ensure 100 skilled migrant workers and their families can successfully work and settle in regional Australia through investing in the STAY Solution - an effective place-based model that supports retention of skilled workers in the regions. | 9 |
| 4. Examine the economic and social impacts of the waiting period for new permanent residents to access income support with a view to waiving it or reducing it to six months | Review the four year Newly Arrived Resident Waiting Period (NARWP) for new permanent residents to access income support with a view to waiving it or reducing it to six months. If there is any waiting period, it should commence from arrival in Australia rather than once permanent residency is attained. | 11 |
| 5. Building capacity of multicultural communities and organisations for the prevention and early intervention of domestic, family and sexual violence | Invest in prevention and early intervention of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV), led by multicultural communities (including community and faith leaders, and other social responders) and multicultural and settlement organisations, which recognises and responds to the diversity among these communities and their experiences. | 13 |
| 6. Implement the foundations of the National Anti Racism Framework | Urgently implement the National Anti-Racism Framework's first two key recommendations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To commit to the National Anti-Racism Framework to eliminate racism in Australia; and 2. To establish a National Anti-Racism Taskforce to oversee and advise on its implementation | 15 |

In addition, SSI's budget proposals outlined above complement and intersect with those put forward by several peak bodies including ACOSS, the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) and the Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA).

For further information, please contact:

Sonia Vignjevic
General Manager Growth & Stakeholder Relations

Settlement Services International
M: 0435 874 429 E: svignjevic@ssi.org.au

Proposal 1: Implement Activate Australia's Skills' solutions to make Australia's skills-recognition system faster, fairer and more affordable

Proposal Description

The Activate Australia's Skills' campaign's 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission outlines four costed proposals to make Australia's skills-recognition system faster, fairer and more affordable, easing bottlenecks that are slowing the efficient deployment of skilled labour and exacerbating skill shortages. The Australian Government should:

- fund and implement a Skills Recognition or Labour Mobility Commissioner;
- fund and implement Skills Recognition Grants;
- fund and implement a National Skills Recognition Portal; and
- fund and implement Career Gateway Hubs.

The four solutions are not isolated – they are part of a holistic proposal to reform Australia's bureaucratic and expensive system for recognising overseas skills and qualifications.

These four solutions are supported by more than 130+ organisations which form part of the [Activate Australia's Skills campaign](#) that SSI convenes, including businesses, unions, social services and community organisations. Activate Australia's Skills is an alliance campaign advocating for reforms to improve skills and qualifications policy in order to address shortages crippling Australian communities, families and businesses. Please refer to Activate Australia's Skill's 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission to access the full details of each solution's impact, cost breakdown and implementation considerations.

| Solution | Description | Funding |
|--|---|--|
| 1. Skills Recognition or Labour Mobility Commissioner | Create one national governance framework for all overseas skills and qualifications recognition, supported by an independent Commissioner/Ombudsman with regulatory powers to ensure efficiency, fairness, affordability and accountability. | \$18.7m over 4 years |
| 2. Skills Recognition Grants | Financial support to individuals, removing cost barriers that hold them back from going through the overseas skills and qualifications recognition process. | \$14m over 4 years |
| 3. National Skills Recognition Portal | National online portal (a one-stop-shop) that provides clear, integrated information on how to get skills and qualifications recognised in certain states/territories and professions, with referrals to services to provide appropriate support. | \$5.25m over 4 years |
| 4. Career Gateway Hubs | Place-based, integrated employment hubs with broad eligibility and specialist skills recognition navigators who guide migrants through the recognition and licensing process and connect qualified workers with roles that match their skills. | \$8m *per hub* over 4 years |
| | | Total: \$46m over 4 years + additional Hubs |

Delivery timeframes

2026-27 and ongoing over the forward estimates.

Rationale and impact

“I thought it would be easy to find a job in Australia, but it wasn’t. I had degrees in computer science from Iran and Japan, but I had to apply for more than 1,000 jobs in Australia before I eventually got an IT role. I worked as a labourer while I tried to find work in my field.”¹ (IT Specialist from Afghanistan who now works for Accenture in Adelaide as an Application Development Analyst)

Skills recognition reform was one of the strongest areas of consensus at the Treasurer’s Economic Reform Roundtable in August 2025, backed by unions, industry, and the community sector, and identified by the Treasurer among the ten priority outcomes for national productivity reform. This consensus was reaffirmed at the Council on Federal Financial Relations meeting in November 2025 when Treasurers nation-wide agreed to prioritise work on recognising skills, including better linking occupational licensing with skills assessment for migration, improving the timeliness of migrant skills assessments, and providing support to help migrants navigate the skills recognition system. The upcoming federal budget is an opportunity to translate this ever-growing consensus into action by funding practical, proven measures to make Australia’s skills-recognition system faster, fairer and more affordable, easing bottlenecks that are slowing the efficient deployment of skilled labour and exacerbating skill shortages.

One-third of all occupations in Australia are in shortage, and two-thirds of these have licensing requirements. Persistent workforce gaps are acting as a handbrake on productivity and economic growth. Despite chronic skill shortages, there are 253,000 permanent migrants in Australia with qualifications in accredited or licensed professions who are working below their skill level. The process to get overseas skills and qualifications recognised is expensive, confusing, time-consuming and often unfair, with limited to no accountability to ensure authorities are meeting industry needs.

If underutilised migrants were able to work in their fields, shortages across critical services and industries would ease substantially. Australia could immediately gain up to 20,000 teachers, 50,000 engineers, 16,000 nurses, 5,000 psychologists and 1,300 electricians already living here but working outside their industries or below their skill level. Unlocking this workforce would boost productivity, reduce class sizes, shorten waiting lists and improve essential services, with additional nurses alone enabling care for 22,800 more hospital patients.² On average, each underutilised migrant who returns to their accredited profession through a better skills-recognition system delivers a productivity gain of \$42,580 per year.³

The Activate Australia’s Skills’ campaign’s 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission outlines four practical, evidence-based solutions to improve Australia’s overseas skills and qualifications recognition system, drawing on international best practice.⁴ The four solutions are not isolated – they are part of a holistic proposal to reform Australia’s bureaucratic and expensive system for recognising overseas skills and qualifications.

Rather than introducing industry-specific fixes that risk adding further complexity and fragmentation, these solutions are system-wide to address the root causes of failures in Australia’s skills and qualifications recognition system. They focus on getting the policy settings and incentives right to create a system of

¹ SSI. (2023a). *Billion Dollar Benefit: A roadmap for unleashing the economic potential of refugees and migrants*. Retrieved from https://www.billiondollarbenefit.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Billion_Dollar_Benefit_Report-1.pdf

² Activate Australia’s Skills. (2025). *The Productivity Fast Track: Accelerating growth through better skills recognition*. Retrieved from https://activateaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/The-productivity-Fast-Track_digital.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

continuous improvement, where barriers to fairness, affordability and efficiency are routinely identified and addressed — maximising outcomes for industry, the economy and qualified migrants alike.

Policy alignment

Solution 1: Skills Recognition or Labour Mobility Commissioner

The proposal for one national governance framework and Skills Recognition or Labour Mobility Commissioner or ombudsman with regulatory powers to lift efficiency, fairness and affordability across the end-to-end system aligns strongly with the recommendations of the 2024 *Migration, Pathway to Nation Building* Inquiry.⁵ In its final report, the Joint Standing Committee on Migration recommended that, “the Government should undertake more fundamental steps to improve the integrity, consistency, fairness, and timeliness of skills assessment processes”. More specifically, it recommended that “the Australian Government considers providing Jobs and Skills Australia the statutory power to oversee the work of Australia’s skills assessment decisions” (recommendation 36) and take the lead in a nationally-coordinated approach to harmonising the regulation of skills assessment, qualification recognition, and occupational licensing requirements across the nation (recommendation 37). The Settlement Council of Australia’s Policy Platform also calls for this solution.⁶

Solution 2: Skills Recognition Grants

In line with the Government’s commitment to make services and opportunities more accessible, this solution would reduce cost barriers that hold back many overseas-trained workers from getting their skills and qualifications recognised. It would also help achieve the objective of employment services reform (including the Select Committee on Workforce Australia’s *Rebuilding the employment services system* led by Julian Hill MP) to connect people with the full range of social and economic opportunities, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or where they live.

Solution 3: National Skills Recognition Portal

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration’s 2024 *Migration, Pathway to Nation Building* Inquiry recommended establishing an online portal as a one-stop-shop for navigating skills and qualifications recognition and occupational licensing requirements, available in multiple languages.⁷ Such an online ‘one-stop-shop’ could be developed as part of a wider effort by the Commonwealth and the state and territory governments to harmonise licensing requirements, across jurisdictions.

Solution 4: Career Gateway Hubs

The concept of Career Gateway Hubs aligns strongly with the recommendations of the 2023 Inquiry into the employment services system led by Julian Hill MP,⁸ including the need to recognise that people have different pathways to economic participation and that specialist service offerings are needed for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Brotherhood of St Laurence is also supportive of these Hubs.

The *Migration, Pathway to Nation Building* Inquiry also recommended the Australian Government implement “a pilot program to better aid refugees in navigating the skills assessment and qualification recognition processes in Australia” (recommendation 46) and that a system be established “through which refugees are more directly connected to job opportunities relevant to their skills and qualifications” (recommendation 48).⁹ Career Gateway Hubs would deliver this, but with a broader mandate to not only support refugees but also the 620,000 permanent migrants in Australia who are working below their level of skill and qualification, which represents roles across all fields, not only the 253,000 who are in accredited or licensed professions.

⁵ Australian Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration. (2024). *Migration, Pathway to Nation Building*. Retrieved from https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportjnt/Migration_PathwaytoNationBuilding.pdf

⁶ Settlement Council of Australia. (2024). *Settlement Policy Platform*. Retrieved from <https://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/SCOA-Policy-Platform-Nov24-Final.pdf>

⁷ Australian Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2024). Op. cit.

⁸ Australian Parliament House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. (2023). *Rebuilding Employment Services: Final Report on Workforce Australia Employment Services*. Retrieved from https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/RB000017/toc_pdf/RebuildingEmploymentServices.pdf

⁹ Australian Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2024). Op. cit.

Proposal 2: Reform Workforce Australia Reform through Specialised Employment Streams

Proposal Description

Redesign Workforce Australia into a specialised, human-centred employment services system by replacing one-size-fits-all contracts with cohort streams (Refugee/Humanitarian; Newly Arrived Migrants; Long-term Unemployed; Youth; Disability/Complex Needs), mandating lower caseloads for specialist workers; embedding employer partnership / local place-based commissioning; and issuing specialist licenses that reflect population cohorts that need specialised support.

It is anticipated that this proposal is revenue neutral, as the reforms will be funded by current employment services system budget allocations.

Delivery timeframes

2026-27 and ongoing over the forward estimates.

Rationale and impact

The current generalist model applied by Workforce Australia struggles with high caseloads and inconsistent outcomes for complex cohorts (such as refugees and the long-term unemployed). Specialist streams are more effective for intensive needs. Accordingly, it is crucial to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach in employment services and instead establish specialised support streams that cater to the unique needs of specific cohorts such as refugees, migrants, youth, and individuals facing complex barriers.

There has been a long-standing concern about the effectiveness of Federally-funded employment services for different cohorts of job seekers, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Specific challenges include having insufficient Australian work experience, limited English language proficiency, lack of understanding of rights and responsibilities and experiences of racism and discrimination.¹⁰ Specialist providers bring skills and capabilities that are responsive to the particular needs of disadvantaged groups; can contribute strongly to co-design through existing links to, and knowledge of, community needs and preferences, and their reach with local diverse communities.

Examples of this can be seen in SSI's first-hand experience in co-designing and delivering specialised employment support through the Refugee Employment Support Program (RESP). The RESP, funded by the NSW Government from 2017 to 2024, supported refugees and people seeking asylum to obtain sustainable and skilled employment. The program worked with local employers, training bodies and other NGOs to connect eligible refugees and people seeking asylum with training, support and jobs. The program employed multicultural employment specialists to provide tailored support based on participants' skills, experience and goals.

The independent evaluation of RESP found that overall, the program provided an innovative and successful response to the difficult and unique challenges that refugees, and people seeking asylum face in finding employment and overcoming economic exclusion; a critical and necessary step towards successful settlement in Australia.¹¹ RESP achieved strong employment outcomes, with more than a quarter of all those who

¹⁰ Australian Parliament Senate Education and Employment References Committee. (2018). *JobActive: Failing those it is intended to serve*. Commonwealth of Australia. Retrieved from https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportsen/024217/toc_pdf/Jobactivefailingthoseitisintendedtoserve.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf

¹¹ SVA Consulting. (2022). *Refugee Employment Support Program: Final Evaluation 2017-2022*. SVA Consulting/NSW Government. Unpublished.

participated in RESP commencing employment during the program.¹² More than half of RESP participants who completed a survey for the evaluation were employed, the majority in permanent jobs.¹³ In addition, it found that RESP offered a better experience for refugees and people seeking asylum than mainstream employment services, including Workforce Australia, and exceeded the overall program targets.¹⁴

Having Workforce Australia tailor services to priority population cohorts recognises their distinct challenges and unlocks better pathways to employment. By prioritising cohort-specific specialisation, the Australian Government can more effectively address uneven outcomes and systemic barriers that newcomers and vulnerable groups encounter. However, only very limited numbers of specialist licenses were issued in areas of high demand for these cohorts and in some areas (e.g. South West Sydney) no CALD or refugee licenses were issued. This runs counter to the policy intent to deliver personalised and specialised support to job seekers. This proposal is to address that discrepancy.

“The Refugee Employment Support Program helped Lucas to develop a career pathway plan that would address his barriers to employment, develop work readiness and provide guidance and financial assistance through the qualification recognition process ... Lucas can now continue on his path to becoming a doctor.”¹⁵
(NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Settlement)

Policy alignment

This proposal is aligned to the Australian Government’s Employment White Paper and the ongoing Employment Services reform agenda. The White Paper reflected the Australian Government’s intent to embark on redesign of the employment services system to emphasise activation, capability development and employer engagement.

The Workforce Australia Inquiry similarly found that the current system is broad, compliance-driven, and not tailored enough for cohorts with unique barriers. In particular, refugees and migrants require specialised cultural, trauma-informed and skills transfer expertise. That Inquiry accordingly recommended the Australian Government should expand specialised services for different cohorts including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

This proposal will better realise the objectives of workforce training skills, apprenticeship and recognition reforms that all rely on a capable employment services system to ensure trained and qualified workers from all population cohorts obtain suitable jobs in the labour market.

While the Australian Government’s response to the Inquiry in July 2024 provided high level support to an employment services system that better meets local community needs; variety of service providers in employment services, particularly community-based organisations, including social enterprises; and enhancing employment services’ frontline staff skills to meet diverse needs,¹⁶ adopting this proposal will better deepen its impact on ensuring priority population cohorts obtain optimal employment outcomes.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ NSW Government / Shergold, P. (2022). *NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Settlement: 5 Years in Review*. Retrieved from <https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CGRR-5-years-in-review-report.pdf>

¹⁶ Australian Government. (2024). *Australian Government response to the House Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services reports: Your Future Planning, Rebuilding Employment Services*. Retrieved from <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=bae2fd1c-e41c-4cc9-9c1a-ae6e37b5781d>

Proposal 3: Unlock regional migration through the STAY Solution – A flexible, subsidised regional employment retention model

Proposal Description

The STAY Solution is a place-based model aimed at ensuring employers retain skilled workers who migrate to the regions. Providing up to 24 months of locally tailored settlement support to skilled migrants appointed by employers in regional Australia, the STAY Solution's whole-of-family approach builds belonging, improves liveability and helps newcomers put down roots – driving long-term population and economic growth. In delivering the STAY Solution, SSI supports skilled migrants aiming to work and settle in regional Australia with broad expertise in migration, settlement, cultural responsiveness training, and immigration legal services. The STAY Solution reduces costly recruitment churn for employers and ensures regional Australia has continuity of essential services across local government, healthcare, trades, engineering and other critical sectors.

This proposal is for the Australian Government to invest a modest \$0.55m towards piloting the STAY Solution to support 100 families settle in the regions. Following a successful evaluation, the STAY Solution can be scaled nationally to generate greater economic and social returns.

| Cost Item | Funding | Notes |
|---------------------------------------|------------------|--|
| STAY Solution delivery (100 families) | \$450,000 | Includes all relocation & 24-month support |
| Regional outreach & marketing | \$20,000 | |
| Independent evaluation | \$80,000 | |
| Pilot management & reporting | \$50,000 | |
| Employer contribution | -\$50,000 | At \$500 per family |
| TOTAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING | \$550,000 | |

Delivery timeframes

2026-27 ongoing over the forward estimates.

Rationale and impact

Regional Australia is experiencing chronic workforce shortages across local government, healthcare, trades, engineering, education and community services. Jobs and Skills Australia's 2023 Annual Jobs and Skills Report found that, "skill shortages were more pronounced in regional areas ... [and] the likelihood of employers reporting recruitment challenges increased in proportion to the remoteness of their location".¹⁷ The 2025 Report continues this trend, stating that, "Although recruitment difficulty appears to be showing some sign of easing, recruitment difficulties ... continues to remain one of the greatest challenges for regional employers".¹⁸ Outside major centres, no consistent, scalable or locally adapted workforce retention infrastructure exists. Key challenges to retaining a skilled workforce in the regions include lack of structured support to support

¹⁷ Jobs and Skills Australia. (2023). *Towards a National Jobs and Skills Roadmap: Annual Jobs and Skills Report 2023*. Retrieved from <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/publications/towards-national-jobs-and-skills-roadmap>, p. 14.

¹⁸ Jobs and Skills Australia. (2025). *Connecting for impact - The Annual Jobs and Skills Report 2025*. Retrieved from <https://www.jobsandskills.gov.au/download/19867/jobs-and-skills-report-2025/3550/connecting-impact-jobs-and-skills-report-2025/docx>

newcomers and especially their families to form community connections; “one-size-fits-all” policy being insufficiently responsive to diverse regional contexts; and employers bearing the cost of repeated recruitment without retention outcomes. The Review of the Migration System (the Parkinson review) recognises factors such as infrastructure, employment opportunities, housing and access to services are likely to be more important in attracting and retaining people in regional areas than the provision of regionally-focused visa pathways.¹⁹ Similarly, the lack of specialised services tailored to the needs of newcomers (such as specialised health services, interpreter services) and lack of additional support to integrate into the local labour market²⁰ may create barriers to regional settlement.²¹

The risks associated with regional retention such as community readiness, housing constraints, employer engagement variability, and the complexity of newcomer settlement are real but manageable. The STAY Solution actively mitigates these challenges through locally tailored design, strong partnerships with local councils and community and faith organisations, a 1:1 Welcome Ambassador model, structured partner employment support, and a contingency fund to address urgent needs. Continuous safeguarding audits, data-driven progress tracking, and regular employer and newcomer check-ins further ensure the model remains responsive and compliant. With these mechanisms in place, the risks are low relative to the substantial economic and social returns delivered to regional communities.

The STAY Solution’s 90%+ retention rate delivers significant economic and social benefits to regional Australia by strengthening workforce stability, productivity and community cohesion. At just \$5,500 per newcomer in government co-investment, the STAY Solution is a national, scalable model that is meaningfully adaptable and responsive to each region it supports. To date, the STAY Solution has made over 90 successful regional placements across 25+ LGAs nationally.

Government investment is needed to bridge the gap between migration settings and real retention in regional Australia by enabling newcomers to establish lives, not just jobs.

“Thank you [STAY] for all your help. I am setting down now. I really appreciate all the support with this move.”²²
(ES, Civil Engineer, Gladstone QLD)

Policy alignment

The recommendation is strongly aligned to the Government’s priority to address national skills shortage and focus on addressing place-based disadvantage and offers a response to the Parkinson Review of the Migration System that highlighted the additional challenges experienced by the regions. Furthermore, it responds to the Australian Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration’s Migration, Pathways to Nation Building report that noted stakeholder input that “increased skilled migration was only likely to be effective following reform of the underlying visa settings and the creation of a welcoming environment to encourage migrants to choose and then settle in regional Australia”.²³ As early as 2014, the then Department of Immigration and Border Protection identified the importance of ensuring available, quality employment for family members to ensure regional Australia can retain skilled migrants.²⁴

¹⁹ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. (2023). *Review of the Migration System Final Report*. Australian Government. Retrieved from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/files/review-migration-system-final-report.pdf>

²⁰ Musoni, E. (2019). *Understanding regional settlement in Australia: Key learnings from past experiences*. Canberra: Regional Australian Institute.

²¹ ARTD Consultants/SSI. (2021). *Summary of the Evaluation of the HSP In Armidale*. Sydney: SSI; van Kooy, J., Wickes, R., & Ali, A. (2019). *Welcoming Regions*. Monash University/Welcoming Cities.

²² SSI. (2024). *Work & Stay – What they say about us*. Retrieved from <https://workandstay.com.au/stay/#:~:text=What%20they%20say%20about%20us>

²³ Australian Parliament Joint Standing Committee on Migration (2024). *Op. cit.*

²⁴ Department of Immigration and Border Protection. (2014). *Regional retention of migrants: Critical success factors*. Australian Government.

Proposal 4: Examine the economic and social impacts of the waiting period for new permanent residents to access income support with a view to waiving it or reducing it to six months

Proposal description

The Australian Government should examine the economic and social impacts of the waiting period for new permanent residents to access income support with a view to waiving it or reducing it to six months. If there is any waiting period, it should commence from arrival in Australia rather than once permanent residency is attained. This would be consistent with the direction of reforms canvassed by the Australian Government's independent Review into the Migration System.

Delivery timeframes

2026-27 ongoing over the forward estimates.

Rationale and impact

Providing basic rights and opportunities to support economic inclusion matters not only because of the impacts on the wellbeing of newcomers but also because the way that governments treat migrants and refugees underpins social cohesion. Inclusive policies provide the foundation for positive attitudes and interactions between newcomers and the broader community and nurture an overall sense of belonging, well-being and trust. Conversely, restrictive policies reinforce fear and division within the community.²⁵

A fundamental purpose of Australia's social security system is to provide a safety net to support residents and citizens during times when they cannot adequately support themselves and their families. People who have recently become permanent residents have obligations to obey Australian laws and pay taxes. They should also have an equal right to income support and essential services in times of need.

Despite this, successive Australian Governments have restricted access by permanent residents to the social safety net. Since 1993, where it was first introduced, the Newly Arrived Resident Waiting Period (NARWP) has progressively grown from an original period of 6 months to a four- year period since 2019. The NARWP impacts a range of working age payments and concession cards including Jobseeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payments (refugees and humanitarian entrants are exempt from these measures and there are some other exceptions).²⁶

These waiting periods were waived as part of the Australian Government's response to COVID-19 from March 2020 until April 2021. This waiver was critical to helping people meet basic costs of living as the country went into recession. When the waiver was removed at the end of March 2022, 24,000 people serving a waiting period immediately lost access to income support, including almost 17,000 receiving JobSeeker Payment.²⁷

Unlike 1993, when the NARWP was first introduced, today about half of all new permanent residents each year have been temporary residents in Australia for many years and have already made a significant economic and

²⁵ Migrant Integration Policy Index. (2020). *Migrant integration policy index 2020*.

²⁶ Australian Government. (2025). '3.1.2.40 Newly arrived resident's waiting period (NARWP)'. *Guides to Social Policy Law – Social Security Guide Version 1.333 – Released 3 November 2025*. Retrieved from <https://guides.dss.gov.au/social-security-guide/3/1/2/40>

²⁷ Department of Social Services. (2021). *2021-2022 Budget Estimates (Social Services, 3 June)*.

social contribution to Australia.²⁸ Yet, they are denied basic income support when in need.²⁹ Like all residents, new permanent residents are vulnerable if unforeseen events or personal circumstances affect their ability to earn a liveable income.

In addition to financial hardship and poverty, the NARWP has unintended impacts. Research by the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) on ways to improve skilled migration found almost one in four permanent skilled migrants are working beneath their skill level.³⁰ The analysis found that the four-year waiting period for new permanent residents has exacerbated this skills mismatch, while delivering only modest annual savings to the federal budget. CEDA found that permanent skilled migrants are driven to take jobs outside of and below their skill set to earn a living wage as quickly as possible. In SSI's experience, the waiting period is also driving people to work before they gain a sufficient level of English proficiency, which in turn, may intensify the problem of skills mismatch. Similarly, young new permanent residents are significantly disadvantaged in undertaking study or training due to the NARWP rendering them ineligible for Youth Allowance or Austudy for four years.³¹

"We should not be drawing these arbitrary distinctions between new permanent residents and other Australians. If you are working and paying tax, you should be eligible for the same benefits as everybody else.

[T]here is also an economic imperative for reducing wait times to access tax concessions and welfare support so that we harness the full benefits of skilled migration."³² (Violet Roumeliotis, SSI CEO)

Policy alignment

The independent Review into the Migration System (the Parkinson Review) canvassed the NARWP, concluding that, "while the NARWP creates significant savings for the budget, there is little data or analysis of the impacts of the NARWP on migrant outcomes, so there is no way of knowing whether its economic and fiscal impacts are positive or negative".³³ The Review recommended a thorough examination of the NARWP to develop a clearer understanding of the economic and social impacts of this policy on migrant outcomes. ACOSS's Pre Budget Submission has gone further, recommending the NARWP be substantially reduced as many people subjected to the NARWP have already lived and worked in Australia for years on temporary visas before applying for permanent residency.

²⁸ The Treasury and Department of Home Affairs. (2018). *Shaping a nation: Population growth and immigration over time*. Australian Government. Canberra; Love, S. (2022). 'Briefing Book Article: Immigration', in Department of Parliamentary Services Parliamentary Library, *Briefing Book: Key issues for the 47th Parliament*. Retrieved from https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/Research/Briefing_Book/47th_Parliament/Immigration

²⁹ The Treasury and Department of Home Affairs (2018). Op. cit.

³⁰ CEDA. (2021). *A Good Match: Optimising Australia's permanent skilled migration*; Department of Home Affairs (2023). Op. cit.

³¹ Department of Home Affairs (2023). Op. cit.

³² SSI. (2021). *New resident welfare wait times must be reduced, not increased, in interest of equity and the economy*. Retrieved from <https://www.ssi.org.au/media-centre/media-releases/new-resident-welfare-wait-times-must-be-reduced-not-increased-in-interest-of-equity-and-the-economy/>

³³ Department of Home Affairs (2023). Op. cit.

Proposal 5: Building prevention and early intervention of domestic, family and sexual violence capacity of multicultural communities and organisations

Proposal Description

The Australian Government should invest in prevention and early intervention of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) led by multicultural communities (including community and faith leaders, and other social responders) and multicultural and settlement organisations. Doing so will better recognise and address challenges related to the diversity of the experiences of DFSV among these communities. This proposal is for investment to target the following:

1. Formally recognise and resource the role of multicultural communities (including community and faith leaders, and other social responders) and multicultural and settlement organisations, within the DFSV prevention and early intervention ecosystem as enablers and facilitators of systems access for migrant and refugee victim-survivors.
2. Formally recognise and resource the role of multicultural and settlement organisations as critical partners in DFSV prevention and early intervention and equip them with appropriate skills and resources to facilitate migrant and refugee victim-survivor access to DFSV responses.
3. Resource the uplifting of capability for culturally responsive practice across the specialist DFSV workforce to address structural barriers to service access and quality of service experience for migrant and refugee victim-survivors, and to support referral by multicultural communities, and multicultural and settlement organisations.
4. Resource partnerships between multicultural communities, multicultural and settlement organisations, and the specialist DFSV sector to leverage complementary expertise and connections and to embed pathways from community to professional DFSV support for migrant and refugee victim-survivors.
5. Resource the availability of training and capacity building available to faith and community leaders, and other social responders, on preventing and responding to DFSV that is accessible and responsive to their language, literacy and digital literacy needs.
6. Resource the establishment and activation of social responder (including community and faith leadership) networks in multicultural communities to address potential isolation, to build confidence for continued and expanded application of knowledge and skills, and to foster peer learning and support.
7. Resource training and other initiatives to support the safety and wellbeing of community and faith leaders and other social responders to DFSV, facilitating role clarity, boundary setting, strategies for self-care and support to prevent and mitigate vicarious trauma.

Considering the scope and significant scale of this proposal, government is better positioned to quantify the budget commitment it can make to ensure sustained impact.

Delivery timeframes

2026-27 and ongoing over the forward estimates.

Rationale and impact

Reinvesting and increasing investment in dedicated DFSV prevention in settlement services would realise the potential impact of multicultural communities (including community and faith leaders, and other social

responders) and multicultural and settlement organisations through systemic and sustained recognition and support for their role as key actors in the DFSV prevention and response ecosystem. Multicultural communities and organisations must be made increasingly visible in relevant national strategies and action plans in order to facilitate programmatic responses that consolidate prior investment and learning. Building sustained capability for safe, community-led and culturally responsive prevention and early intervention is crucial.

The proposal is supported by the findings of a comprehensive national consultation undertaken by SSI in partnership with the Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance (AMWA) auspiced by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) as part of the Train, Engage, Connect and Support (TECS) program, funded by the Australian Government under the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*.³⁴

"I don't know how to help. If someone approaches me, I may give counselling, but I cannot be confident or know exactly what to do... Faith and community leaders need to have the confidence to respond."³⁵ (Community leader participant in Train, Engage, Connect and Support national consultation)

Policy alignment

This proposal aligns with the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* that identifies the need to build community and sector capacity to identify and support women and children at increased risk of experiencing gender-based violence and to intervene early to stop violence from escalating. In this regard, investing in capacity building of multicultural communities for DFSV prevention and response in their community context is crucial.³⁶

This proposal also strongly aligns with the recommendations from the *Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches* to address DFV commissioned by the Prime Minister in response to a rise in DFV-related homicides which was handed to the Australian Government in August 2024.³⁷ The report from that review notes the need to prioritise experiences of communities who face intersecting forms of marginalisation, including migrant and refugee communities, and to implement genuine and sustained co-design approaches in developing gender-based violence responses.³⁸

The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's Yearly Report to Parliament 2025 recommends that, as part of the Action Planning process, all government identifies strategies to upskill migrant and multicultural organisations to become more DFSV competent and address issues of cultural safety and race within DFSV organisations.³⁹

At a programmatic level, the proposal is consistent with the Australian Government's intention to enhance and improve its existing investment in settlement programs as articulated in the Department of Home Affairs *Settlement and Integration Outcomes Framework*.⁴⁰

³⁴ SSI. (2025). *Policy Insights: Mobilising faith and community leaders for DFSV prevention and early intervention in migrant and refugee communities*. Retrieved from https://www.ssi.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Policy_insights_Mobilising_faith_community_leaders_2025.pdf

³⁵ SSI. (2025). *Train, Engage, Connect and Support national consultation input*. Unpublished.

³⁶ Australian Government Department of Social Services. (2022). *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032*. Retrieved from <https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-gender-based-violence>

³⁷ Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2024). Op. cit.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Domestic Families and Sexual Violence Commission. (2025). *The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission's Yearly Report to Parliament 2025*. Retrieved from <https://www.dfsvc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-12/DFSVC-2025-YearlyReport.pdf>

⁴⁰ Australian Government Department of Home Affairs. (2024). *Refugee and Humanitarian Entrant Settlement and Integration Outcomes Framework*. Retrieved from <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/settling-in-australia/settlement-policy-and-reform/refugee-and-humanitarian-entrant-settlement-and-integration-outcomes-framework>

Proposal 6: Implement the foundations of the National Anti-Racism Framework

Proposal Description

This proposal seeks dedicated funding to start implementing key aspects of the National Anti-Racism Framework developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC). The cumulation of extensive community consultation, the Framework provides a ten-year national roadmap to eliminate racism by addressing its systemic, structural, and interpersonal dimensions across key sectors. The Australian Government's leadership in commissioning the Framework was a vital first step. It is now time to fulfil that commitment — by fully endorsing, funding, and implementing the Framework.

This proposal is for the Australian Government to start this action by urgently implementing the first two recommendations:

1. to commit to the National Anti-Racism Framework to eliminate racism in Australia; and
2. to establish a National Anti-Racism Taskforce to oversee and advise on its implementation.

This proposal aligns with ACOSS Budget Priorities Statement which estimates implementation would require \$5m funding in 2026-27 and \$6m in 2027-28.

Delivery timeframes

2026-27 and 2027-28.

Rationale and impact

While the Framework is the first national roadmap to address the root causes of racism, its implementation is stalled, with no significant progress since its release over a year ago.

At a time when racism and division are deepening, there has never been a more pressing need for action. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience systemic and everyday racism, which has only intensified since the referendum. There can be no racial justice in this country without racial justice for First Nations peoples.

Across the country the limits of our rich multicultural identity are being tested. From the horrific December 2025 antisemitic terror attack in Bondi to the anti-migration rallies and racially charged demonstrations that have occurred across the country, racism remains systemic, widespread and dangerous across Australian society. SSI and sector partners in civil society have presented evidence to that effect, noting a surge in racism, including antisemitism, Islamophobia, and antimigration demonstrations exacerbating social division. These deepening divisions tear at the very fabric of our society and severely test Australia's commitment to respect, inclusion, and social cohesion which is why it is so important that the government acts now.

The Australian Government's development of the National Anti-Racism Framework that provides a roadmap to address the root causes of these issues was a solid first step. The next step is to bring the Framework to life — by formally endorsing, funding and implementing it in partnership with communities.

Investment will:

- Reduce racial discrimination and improve safety, wellbeing, and social cohesion.
- Strengthen trust in public institutions and promote civic participation.
- Support First Nations self-determination and culturally safe service delivery.
- Ensure equitable access to opportunities across all communities.

SSI, together with more than 60 civil society partners, emphasises that national leadership, real investment, and long-term commitment are critical to realising an Australia where dignity, equality, and justice are lived realities for everyone.⁴¹

Action on implementing the National Anti-Racism Framework would reinforce and broaden the impact of the recently announced Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion and its subsequent work. This proposal would signal that the Australian Government is unequivocally committed to eliminating racism in all its forms and to building an Australia where everyone belongs, and where equality, dignity and justice are not only aspirations but everyday experiences for all.

[T]he primary recommendation is for the Australian Government to establish a National Anti-Racism Taskforce ... [that] would identify priority actions for First Peoples and other affected communities. One example could be recommendations aligned with the work ... to combat antisemitism and Islamophobia. ... We already have the solutions to tackle racism in Australia; all we need now is genuine commitment and political will.⁴² (Giridharan Sivaraman, Race Discrimination Commissioner)

Policy alignment

This proposal supports Australian Government commitments to multiculturalism, social cohesion, and human rights. It advances Australia's ratification of and adherence to international obligations such as under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.⁴³ At the national level, this proposal complements the recommendations of the Multicultural Framework Review, aligning with the Australian Government's response that it commits to that Framework's principles (connection, identity and belonging and inclusion) and will be "guided by them refining Australia's multicultural settings".⁴⁴ The proposal is aligned and expected to positively impact Australia's commitments to Closing the Gap by addressing systemic racism affecting First Nations peoples. Starting implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework would provide the architecture that will broaden and strengthen the work and future findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission on Anti-Semitism and Social Cohesion. The community sector's strong support for this proposal is reflected in, for example, ACOSS' Budget Priorities Statement and in FECCA's own call for this action in its Pre Budget Submission.

⁴¹ SSI. (2025, November 24). *Civil society calls for urgent action on the National Anti-Racism Framework*. Retrieved from <https://www.ssi.org.au/civil-society-calls-for-urgent-action-on-the-national-anti-racism-framework/>

⁴² Sivaraman, G. (2025). *National Press Club Address: There's nothing casual about racism: Getting serious about racial equality*. Retrieved from <https://humanrights.gov.au/about-us/media-centre/speeches/race/race-discrimination-commissioner-sivaraman-national-press-club-address>

⁴³ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights. (2026). *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial>

⁴⁴ Australian Government. (2024). *Multicultural Framework Review: Australian Government Response*. Retrieved from <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/multicultural-framework-review/Documents/multicultural-framework-review-government-response.pdf>