



# Solis

## Culture & Mental Health

### Cultural Diversity: *Read the Label!* Report - 2023

**Authors:**

Niharika Hiremath, Mallika Murthy, Narissa Doumani, Judy Tang

Reviewed by Solis Think Tank

*Solis pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of Country, and to Elders present and across time. We acknowledge as the Solis collective that we are on stolen land, and that sovereignty was never ceded. We stand in solidarity with First Nations People and know that the work we do would not be possible without acknowledging the strength, knowledge and struggle of First Nations People. It is important to remember the rights of First Nations People as the First Peoples on this continent, irrespective of the fields in which we work.*



AIDMH

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# Executive Summary

The use of labels within the social impact sector, specifically the mental health sector, has been long contested. Whilst the focus has been on what to call whom and when - deeper conversations about these important considerations have seldom been had in the development of this work. And so, when our communities called for us to come together and start an ongoing conversation about exactly this, we saw it as an opportunity to start a broader dialogue that had direct input from the very communities that we are seeking to define.

Solis - Culture & Mental Health (*Solis*) unites culture-oriented mental health advocates and professionals, as the peer and professional arm of the Australian Institute for Diversity in Mental Health (*AIDMH*). As interdisciplinary advocates, we address complex identity issues and culturally responsive practice. To honour collective and community-focused approaches, we initiated an annual dialogue on the use of labels in community. In an attempt to dismantle monolithic assumptions, we tried to focus on person-centred storytelling to dissect terms like 'CALD' and 'multicultural', among others. The report summarises our findings in light of a number of other recent reports and projects exploring similar concepts around the need for nuanced labels to empower cultural identities, and to drive ongoing discussions to amplify underrepresented voices and drive sector evolution. We sought to centre the notion that we need to understand labelling's purpose. We want to prioritise community comprehension over labels, in order to foster meaningful discussions.

The following questions were posed to participants, and explored in this report:

- *How do these terms relate to you or your communities?*
- *How do you think governments, organisations or other groups define our cultural communities? Is this the same or different to the ways in which we name ourselves?*
- *How do you think we should measure culture?*

A broad variety of community feelings were explored such as: themes on labels, inclusion/exclusion, and in varied contexts, culture's complexity, power dynamics, the fluidity of cultural identity, systemic challenges and practicality and acknowledgement of privilege. Intersectionality, culture beyond countries/languages. funding's focus, alternative terms, comprehensive understanding and purposeful data collection were all also raised.

A number of practical recommendations for the sector are summarised in light of implications for research and policy being put forward. In acknowledging that this is just the beginning of the conversation, we hope that the process, content and themes arising from our Language Forum prompt an opportunity to critically and meaningfully reflect on how we define ourselves and broader diverse communities to work towards a more intersectional and inclusive mental wellbeing sector, and society.



# Introduction

## Read the Label

The use of labels within the social impact sector, specifically the mental health sector, has been long contested. Whilst the focus has been on what to call whom and when - deeper conversations about these important considerations have seldom been had in the development of this work. And so, when our communities called for us to come together and start an ongoing conversation about exactly this, we saw it as an opportunity to start a broader dialogue that had direct input from the very communities that we are seeking to define.

## Solis - The opposite of silos

Solis - Culture & Mental Health (*Solis*) came together as a capacity-building, support & resource network for culture-oriented, multicultural mental health advocates and practitioners. Solis is a project under the Australian Institute for Diversity in Mental Health (*AIDMH*), whose primary role is in supporting and advocating for communities and professional peers in culture-oriented multicultural mental health.

Being a group of interdisciplinary, intersectional advocates and professionals, we have often collectively identified as being “both inside and outside the community.” And so, navigating these complicated conversations about identity and culturally responsive practice and critically reflecting on these things has given us many opportunities to informally explore the very question this report seeks to open a dialogue on.

For many of us, labels and misunderstandings about cultural identity are woven into our experiences in supporting the mental well-being of multicultural communities. And so, conversations of whether to utilise ‘multicultural’, or ‘refugee and migrant background’, or the infamous ‘culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)’ - and when to use these – have been a point of discussion and contention both within our own private circles and definitely so within the broader sector.

## Why a language forum?

In paying respect to collectivist and community-focused ways of being and doing, we heard the calls for an intentional conversation - and brought together a forum for members of our communities to start unpacking the complexity around labels.

In particular, we sought to highlight person-centred storytelling as a way to explore the different experiences and journeys that often get ‘lumped’ together as ‘CALD’, ‘multicultural’ or any number of other avenues to define communities. By digging deeper into the nuances of



these individual terms and how these resonate with communities, we sought to challenge the assumptions of them being a monolith for all non-white experiences.

The need for this type of dialogue, and especially so in a measured and nuanced way, has also been echoed in a number of other pieces of work our sector has recently produced. An essay recently released by The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute, and authored by Trish Prentice<sup>1</sup>, reflects on labels in a diverse nation under the title 'Why call me that?':

*"This essay explores the issue of labelling in relation to cultural identity. For many Australians, their cultural background, race and migration history add layers to how they describe themselves and to how others label them. For others, the process of coming to a term or descriptor they feel comfortable with is a journey that involves a deep exploration of their own identity and all its nuances, and their place in the world.*

*Added to this complexity are the labels that are placed on cultural communities by administrative bodies and service providers. Like other labels, these descriptors can have great utility, but also significant limitations."*

In seeking to elevate the specific voices of individuals who are central to discussions about cultural identities and corresponding (or not) labels, the essay aligns strongly with the considerations that are explored in this report.

Underlying tensions and the need for nuance in the use of labels, specifically around the use of "CALD" also underpin the findings from the *How's your Haal? Project's Report*<sup>2</sup>, speaking to the constant pressure around the labelling of identity, and this being a significant source of anxiety with flow of effects to the mental health of communities. Although the project report was released shortly after the convening of our Language Forum, the recommendations highlight the very notions that drive the need for forums and spaces like Solis:

*"Increase capacity for CALD youth to facilitate community conversations."*

*"Develop peer-to-peer support systems to bridge the gap between CALD youth and service providers."*

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<sup>1</sup>Prentice, T. (2023) 'Why call me that?' - Reflections on labels in a diverse nation. rep. Scanlon Foundation - Research Institute.

<sup>2</sup>Project Team (2021) *Report: How's Your Haal? - A report on our community conversation project regarding the mental health and wellbeing of CaLD youth in WA.* rep.



*“Create opportunities for Co-Design with CALD youth into formal programming.”*

The *How's your Haal's* Report also draws to light and supports the notion that how we measure cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity can and does impact on service delivery/provision:

*“When you feel like the system is not made to service or even understand you, we are much less inclined to seek the very help that could save our lives.*

*...This is a conversation between us and service providers (and it) needs to happen more. If they are willing to listen to our experiences and incorporate that into their delivery, we can be their most powerful advocates.”*

Despite the ways we currently measure labels and broader elements of cultural identity - at a service level, we tend to measure this in a more simplistic manner. This, along with a lack of a consistent approach across the sector, has been articulated by practitioners and community members alike to be significant barriers to good practice<sup>3</sup>.

In drawing from the insights above, starting an ongoing conversation allows voices from the community (those that are usually not represented) to speak their truths and better influence sector responses. In turn, this also promotes the importance of critical self-reflection by the governments, policy makers and organisations that seek to serve these communities.

## A focus on intention

We want to stress the importance of understanding and unpacking the underlying purpose of why you as an individual, organisation or policymaker are seeking to use labels. Despite the benefits of, and at times the need for, classifying people and communities based on characteristics - we need to remember that this is often just a means to an end. If that end is to ensure that the services, supports, or programs we are designing are fit-for-purpose and tailored to the needs of communities, then the importance needs to be placed on deeply understanding our communities - not just labelling them.

To that end, this report has been authored to specifically *not* be a tick and flick exercise, but to instead encourage us to meaningfully explore community experiences when it comes to labels or categories. As well as being an opportunity to build meaningful and thoughtful relationships, carving out the intentional time to have these conversations is a responsibility that sits with the organisations, systems and structures that serve communities themselves. Using this resource as a set of prompts to start unpacking these understandings thus allows for a more thoughtful approach.

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<sup>3</sup>Pham, T.T. *et al.* (2021) 'Definitions of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD): A literature review of Epidemiological Research in Australia', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(2), p. 737. doi:10.3390/ijerph18020737.



Furthermore, it was identified by communities in the planning and implementation of this event that this should indeed be an annual event, in paying respect to the notion that conversations about cultural identity continue to shift, change and evolve and often in quite short periods of time. Ensuring we see this as the beginning of that conversation and journey allows us to revisit these conversations sooner rather than later and drive home the importance of it needing to be an ongoing conversation. To that end, this is the 2023 report - with hopefully a 2024 one to look forward to.



# Cultural Diversity: *Read the Label!* - A Forum

Details from the Forum are summarised below:

With a focus on intercommunity conversation, the Forum was held on the 16th of March 2023 at The Couch International Student Centre in the city of Naarm (Melbourne). A place to call home for international students, The Couch provides a strong sense of community for this cohort and regularly hosts incredible conversations and community-literacy events.

We had 40 attendees that included from the following demographics and a range of ages and backgrounds:

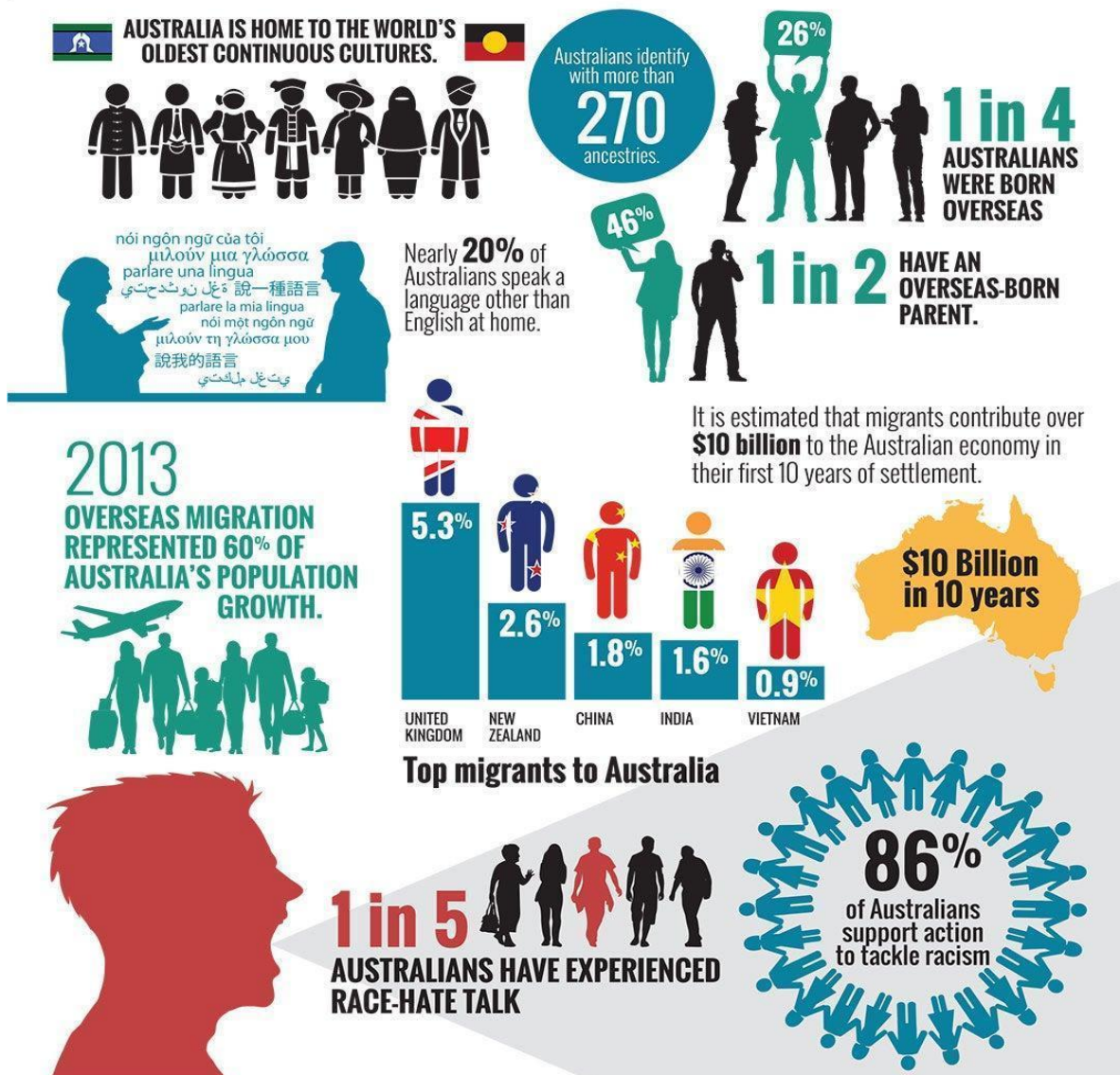
- International and domestic university students
- Multicultural and culture-oriented mental health practitioners and professionals
- Cultural diversity advocates and activists from various sectors
- Multicultural community leaders
- Mental health researchers and academics
- Community and wellbeing organisations

## Summary of terms

To support an informal conversation, and to ensure there was some level of base understanding about some of the terms we wanted to discuss in this forum, we provided participants a Glossary of terms - this can be found in **Appendix 2**. The following useful infographic gives some additional context around the use and environment of these terms.



## Cultural Diversity



**Figure 1 - Australian Human Rights Commission's Face the Facts campaign brought together this information about cultural diversity in 2014. Many of these measures are outdated, but have continued to grow - with, for example, more than half (51.1%) of Australia's residents being born overseas or having parents who were born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics; ABS, 2022).**



## Questions & Prompts from the Forum

In light of the labels and terms in the glossary, we prompted participants with the following questions:

1. *How do these terms relate to you or your communities?*

The small group discussions began with an exploration of how participants felt various labels related to themselves and/or their communities. Each group was provided a list of labels commonly used to define or name culturally diverse communities, and the definition of each (see Appendix 1).

2. *How do you think governments, organisations or other groups define our cultural communities? Is this the same or different to the ways in which we name ourselves?*

In light of how communities define themselves, it was then asked how they felt that governments, organisations and broader groups defined communities. In particular, there was exploration of whether this resonated with how they defined themselves, and what the implications of these differences might look like.

3. *How do you think we should measure culture?*

Finally, we sought to understand that if we were in an ideal world, how should we look to measure culture? What other factors or intersection parts of their cultural identity do communities want acknowledged?

The specific questions and related prompts can be found in **Appendix 1**.

These questions were developed in conjunction with Solis' Think Tank, as a summary of some of the more common questions and themes that are often explored by and with community in relation to labels and the measurement of cultural diversity. The following sections explore some of the broader themes that arose throughout the conversation, followed by some practical reflection points and ongoing questions that individuals, organisations and systems can start to consider about the ways in which communities truly define themselves.

Further information about the running of the event, including detailed 'Project on a page' templates are available for community organisations and other stakeholders interested in running similar events. Please contact us directly and we can provide these for you.



# Insights from diverse communities

## *Till now - Community feelings about how they have been defined*

Several themes emerged within the initial discussions around how current labels and categories made people feel, including the nuanced and complex nature of identity, the power dynamics of labeller vs labelled, and the lack of certainty around who was included and excluded by each label.

### ***Dual experiences of inclusion and exclusion***

A perspective was shared that labels can be 'in-group words' and have the potential to be inclusive and helpful, for instance when they promote the identification of diversity. However, it was felt by some that they lack the ability to capture a sense of shared experience, have the potential to be 'confining' and may create a sense of not belonging. Dual experiences of inclusion and exclusion have been similarly highlighted in the *How's Your Haal? Report*<sup>4</sup>, which explored the 'sense of community, of kinship' and 'sense of unbelonging' the term CALD can create.

### ***A broad variety of labels and contexts***

The labels participants used to refer to their own communities varied broadly. It was noted that labels are not static but context-dependent, and that there can be 'unspoken definitions' of community. Some of the labels used by participants related to their country of origin (Malaysian, Taiwanese, Iranian) or region of origin (South Asian, South-East Asian). Others referred to a shared experience rather than a common birthplace or cultural heritage (international students, migrant and immigrant), or intersecting identities (QTIPOC; queer, trans, intersex people of colour).

For others, it was important to recognise the historical context of their culture. This was the case for participants who self-identified as Anglo-Indian and who discussed a history of connection to Britain and India, and a resulting 'continuum of culture'. Among the labels presented, some participants had previously used multicultural and POC, and one felt that polycultural reflected their experience of migration. The act of labelling can itself be understood as 'an expression of power'<sup>5</sup> which emerged as a common theme among the groups. It was noted that several of the terms define culturally diverse groups in contrast to a white Australian cultural majority.

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<sup>4</sup> Project Team (2021) *Report: How's Your Haal? - A report on our community conversation project regarding the mental health and wellbeing of CaLD youth in WA*. rep.

<sup>5</sup> Prentice, T. (2023) *'Why call me that?' - Reflections on labels in a diverse nation*. rep. Scanlon Foundation - Research Institute.



## **Culture as a social construct**

Participants spoke to what they perceived to be the real meaning behind the attempts to define culture and cultural identity. The notion that the language or labels used can sometimes prescribe how a particular community should be viewed was raised, with people mentioning that they wanted to be authentically heard.

*"(These kinds of definitions will result in the) Dilution of identity."*

*"Migration stories matter."*

*"You can't measure a concept...but you might be able to measure privileges and advantages."*

Many participants spoke to how they felt when they were defined as 'marginalised communities', even in the context of receiving specialised supports when being defined this way:

*"It can promote fear mongering, it feels like othering."*

*"Sometimes you have 'play their game', especially in social or work settings where you might not be addressed otherwise."*

## **The centring nature of labels**

One participant commented that CALD:

*'Puts Australians at the centre and others are diverse,'*

And another, that NESB:

*'Creates a binary where English is the focus and everyone else is grouped together.'*

The discomfort and sense of othering such labels can foster was evidenced by comments such as:

*'These terms just exist to make white people comfortable' and,*

*'[POC] doesn't recognise whiteness as a colour'.*

For one participant, the discussion brought back memories of feeling racially profiled by airport staff on arrival to Australia.



### **Mixed responses on the merits of labels**

Participants also questioned which traits or characteristics should be used to categorise their communities, and the merits of culture (CALD), language (CALD, NESB) or skin colour (POC) as identifiers by which they may be grouped. Some questioned whether the labels recognised things they value (culture was perceived as valuable to one group, but language less so) and others noted the categories were not always clearly defined:

*'What about bilingual people?' 'Can brown people be part of [POC]?'*

Some took offence to the term POC as it defined them by the colour of their skin, although it is noteworthy that other participants' self-chosen labels refer to skin colour, i.e., 'brown people'.

## **At now - Reflections on how systems and institutions define communities**

Following questions around how these terms resonate with communities, participants were then asked to reflect on how institutions tend to define multicultural communities. Questions included those around their thoughts and feelings about governments, organisations, or other groups and how they define our cultural communities. The following perspectives and themes emerged from these questions:

### **Complexity, limitations & difficulties around alternative terms**

Participants acknowledged the difficulties in finding an alternate term to 'CALD' both at an individual and community level, as well as at an institutional level. At the government/institutional level, participants identified that whilst the use of terms such as 'CALD' and 'NESB' can be othering and involves a 'binary' approach, they also recognised the challenges around creating a new term that can effectively capture and reflect the nuanced cultural, linguistic, ethnic and social experiences central to this cohort.

*'I think it's difficult for the government to find alternative terms. A challenge to find a term that is not offensive but can be used to refer to a group of people.'*

The group highlighted the need for government and systems to be 'bold' when challenging the current ways we define and measure multicultural communities:

*'Sometimes the government (is) not strong/bold/daring enough to hear communities/change things/labels.'*



### ***The challenge of an encapsulating term***

However, the task of conceptualising an alternative expression that encapsulates the broad diversity of multicultural communities while avoiding potential stigmatisation remains a complex challenge. For example, research has indicated that at an institutional level in Australia, there is inconsistency across the sector in how 'CALD' is measured<sup>6</sup>.

One key takeaway from the forum was that, as also explored in the section above, there is also inconsistency across multicultural communities about which terms they prefer or use when referencing these communities. There was some consensus that 'multicultural' was a more helpful term.

*'Multicultural can be good if showing/talking about adversity.'*

*'(I) Would prefer multicultural instead of nothing at all.'*

### **Practical, systemic implications of labels**

The group highlighted that these terms serve a practical function rather than just as a 'descriptor' for 'non-white' communities in Australia. For example, several participants identified that they were rarely asked if they were 'CALD' in a useful way, and more likely asked about their visa status:

*'.....Only familiar with visa holder, PR or citizen – these are practical [labels].  
Other [labels] are not practical.'*

### ***Culture in the context of power dynamics & service systems***

Ideas around the power dynamics that labels often denote were discussed, with some powerful statements being raised about what governments and systems may be projecting in historical conversations about labelling communities:

*"(Are labels being used) For the comfort of others? Or for the practicality of our own identity and sense of self?"*

*"When one culture has power over another, that's when the labels tend to matter more."*

As mentioned above, the underlying context came back to the idea that being singled out or a very specific, often not useful, characteristic being used to segregate you sent a message that said you were different. This is also in the context of labels often depending on who holds power.

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<sup>6</sup>Marcus, K. *et al.* (2022) 'Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD): Terminology and standards in reducing healthcare inequalities', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 46(1), pp. 7–9. doi:10.1111/1753-6405.13190.



Other participants noted that when these terms are utilised as ‘descriptors’, it can be uncomfortable and reflect (even unintendedly) underlying notions of white supremacy:

*‘White folk use these terms to make them[selves] comfortable.’*

*“The problem is - are white people uncomfortable? Are labels being used to make white people comfortable?”*

They highlighted the need of developing a term/s with practical implications that can identify community members with shared experiences and challenges. One participant identified that one of the practical benefits of these labels are when understanding cultural diversity and issues with representation. Especially in the case of a society that speaks to ‘Inclusion’ being important, labels used without consideration can often do the exact opposite. However, in the context of the lack of representation and ‘people who look and think like me’, and other systemic issues within, for example, the mental health service system - folks found it could be useful:

*‘How do we get diversity on the table?’*

*‘Working with someone who looks, speaks or thinks like me is important, this is where labels might help...’*

### **Relevancy of these labels for newer migrants**

The terms ‘CALD’ and ‘NESB’ were created over 20 years ago<sup>7</sup> (ABS, 2022). A concern raised, particularly for newer migrants, was the unfamiliarity with these terms and reports that these terms can be imposed on them or feel ‘othering’:

*‘These labels are created by our systems and might not be relevant to new people entering Australia... These become more relevant once you’re acclimatised ... Feel like you have to pick a predetermined label I.e. migrant... Can make people feel discriminated against from the get go’.*

*‘Should we have multiple labels and/or should people have the opportunity to pick their own labels or should it be more nuanced’*

As highlighted in the FECCA report<sup>8</sup>, there is also inconsistency across spaces and sectors for the terminology used. The impacts of this are far reaching, with many community members feeling unrepresented, confused, and frustrated:

*‘This is the first time I’ve heard the government calls us CALD. There is a bias about our thinking of others. I don’t know what the Australian government thinks*

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<sup>7</sup> [Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022.](#)

<sup>8</sup> FECCA (2020a) *IF WE DON’T COUNT IT... IT DOESN’T COUNT! - CALD Data Issues Paper.* rep.



*about my country. First I should know what they think and then I can form an opinion about it.'*

Despite, for example, the context of this last question being around culture more broadly, there were a number of instances where the bearing of these understandings on service systems and how people access services were raised. There were examples of ways in which people felt that, in comparison to other countries, they had not been subject to what they perceived as discrimination. It was also raised that for others, many unacknowledged elements of their cultural identity very strongly affected the way in which they, and their communities, have accessed services.

### **Intersectional framework when referring to community**

Participants highlighted the need to explore labels for multicultural communities through an intersectional framework as well. One participant noted that:

*'Everything is siloed in terms of identity e.g. queerness & female; [there is a] lack of intersectionality'.*

Participants noted that it is important to understand the influence of culture and ethnicity on other marginalised identities as often whiteness and thus not being subject to the use of labels in this way could be seen as a protective factor:

*"Whiteness [can be a] protective, even within intersectional identities'.*

## **From now - Moving toward broader definitions of culture**

In light of considering how the use of labels and categories sat with participants in terms of their personal experiences, as well as their reflections on how institutions and policy-making systems defined them - the final set of questions explored how they best felt that we should measure culture more broadly. Prompts for this part of the conversation included how best to measure culture, and the various, and fluid, factors that can impact your sense of identity.

The following themes emerged from the conversations:

### ***Culture as a multitude of identities***

There was in-depth discussion around the historical measurement of culture being through a limited number of lenses such as Country of birth, Ethnicity or Language/s spoken at home.

Despite starting to give clues around where you come from and what has shaped your life, it was noted that the primary measurement of these areas tends to discount a much richer and more meaningful story about someone's experience of culture.



The following elements were raised as other, often equally important ways to measure and qualify culture:

- Food
- Values
- Music & Dance
- Faith
- Sport
- Hobbies & Interests
- Education
- Art & Literature
- Fashion, Jewellery & Style
- Symbolism

***Culture as more than just countries or languages - as multiple, ever-changing factors***

In acknowledging intersectionality and the many lenses that might make up someone's cultural identity, the notion that culture is actually made up of many different factors that are constantly evolving was explored. The importance of keeping an open mind when exploring what might constitute someone's cultural identity was raised often:

*"I don't think country of birth is appropriate anymore because many people have migrated here but feel Australian. A better way would be the culture they are raised in."*

Although where someone was born might help give you some context of their identity and how it affects the way they might respond to mental health support (for example), it was iterated that this is often not enough. For example, an international student spoke of being stereotyped as Indian, despite being from Malaysia and thus having very different views on certain things. It was articulated that having a deeper understanding of how people were raised, and a vast number of other complexities and differences, will help build a clearer picture of someone's cultural identity, especially as this can also change significantly over time.

*"Sometimes people don't spend enough time in a culture to be part of it, but they identify with that, e.g. to elevate their own status in their home country, if they've spent time overseas. Then their cultural identity has changed."*

Relatedly, although members from the community might speak the same language, there are many other factors that can determine how they react, or navigate a specific context. Examples of this that were given include things like socio-economic contexts, or the types of well-being supports they had access to growing up. Thus, knowing the language/s someone speaks may help provide in-language support, but (even along with knowing their country of birth) you may not get a broader contextual understanding of how responsive they may be to certain types of mental wellbeing support.



### ***Culture as an individual, self-defined experience***

The need for self-determination arose strongly as a theme throughout the conversations:

*"We should be able to self-identify."*

*"How would you feel if people made assumptions about your culture?"*

*"Other people judge you based on skin colour, eyes, accent. But you believe yourself to be someone raised in a place, and that place is, and can be, your culture."*

In particular, the importance of allowing someone to define themselves was iterated, specifically in the context of accessing and receiving health or mental health care. This was also discussed in the context of culture often being quite a personal thing often becomes a public conversation and not always in the most constructive way.

*"Your way of thinking...your personality are strongly influenced by cultural background - but not only by country specifically. This also has a bearing on your navigation of services."*

### ***Culture for the purposes of funding***

There were a number of major themes that arose in relation to the conversation about how culture should be defined in the context of funding or policy-making purposes:

*"It's been 20 years since CALD has been used, it could be time to find a new term. Probably need more conversation to decide on an alternative."*

*"Do we divide funding for all the different groups or should we leave it as one big budget? - Everyone needs to come to the table and properly understand the needs."*

The questionable nature of continuing to use umbrella, cover/catch-all terms such as CALD was spoken to quite strongly. The need to explore alternate avenues of collecting and making meaning from information about cultural identity were raised. This included the need for more comprehensive, qualitative questions to better understand people's stories. It also involved being purposeful in the system's need for data: for example, capturing information about someone's visa status as this can be more useful in allowing a service to be responsive to that person's needs.



# Implications for policy and research

It was clear from the outset of the discussions that labels may point to, but cannot capture, the deeply personal and nuanced nature of identity and shared cultural experiences. While undeniably useful, labels may also be experienced as exclusionary; being defined by one's otherness in relation to a cultural majority can be painful, often creating a sense of unbelonging.

Through this forum, and other key papers in the sector, it is also evident that there is inconsistency in the terminology used to describe 'non-white' populations in Australia. Additionally, whilst there are common terms used by government and the sector, there is inconsistency in what variables are used to identify and measure these populations<sup>9</sup>. One of the key themes that emerged from many of the discussions was that participants acknowledged the complexity and difficulty for governments to find alternative terms to 'CALD'.

Insights from the forum highlighted and mirrored this diversity and the breadth of 'multicultural' experiences. In particular, they spoke to the need for the government and sector to intentionally reconsider how communities are defined and labelled. Whilst terminology and labels can be helpful to identify and understand communities, it can also be an 'othering' and exclusionary process<sup>10</sup>.

Whilst potentially being particularly helpful from a data collection perspective<sup>9</sup>, it was highlighted that these terms are deeply interlinked to people's identity and sense of connection to the wider Australian community. To that end, being intentional about how systems use these labels is an important consideration.

There was no consensus on a preferred label to refer to culturally diverse communities, which is unsurprising given the complexities that were noted. While the usefulness of labels was acknowledged by the groups, it was reiterated that choosing which to use; and how to do so meaningfully; requires deeper, and ongoing exploration.

*'Without labels there's no acknowledgement.'*

*'I think it's difficult for the government to find alternative terms. A challenge to find a term that is not offensive but can be used to refer to a group of people.'*

*'There are many benefits and consequences to using labels in this way. If the government puts me in a separate group though, I don't feel Australian. But if*

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<sup>9</sup> FECCA (2020a) *IF WE DON'T COUNT IT... IT DOESN'T COUNT! - CALD Data Issues Paper*. rep.

<sup>10</sup> Prentice, T. (2023) *'Why call me that?' - Reflections on labels in a diverse nation*. rep. Scanlon Foundation - Research Institute.



*the government uses positive words and words that resonate with me and my community, I can feel sooner like I can be an Australian.'*

## Practical recommendations for reflection

In light of our initial ask to intentionally understand and unpack the underlying purpose of why you as an individual, organisation or policy-maker are seeking to use labels - we have put forward the following questions, considerations and reflection points to allow for further exploration of themes that arose throughout our Forum:

### Points & opportunities for reflection

#### **Labels**

- Consider how people experience the labels we have spoken about. What and whose purpose do (or might) they serve?
- What are the unsaid connotations of using certain labels? What privilege might you be holding in your use of certain labels or categorisations?
- Who should decide what label/s are used, and how?
- Reflect on the purpose behind using the labels you are, what purpose are they serving? Is this actually useful in the context of your work?
- Reflect on the limitations of the label/s being used, and how these can be acknowledged. How can we make this an ongoing reflection or conversation rather than only at a point in time?
- Could these label/s be used in a way that fosters greater inclusivity? What considerations would that involve?

#### **Systems & structures**

- Similar to FECCA, this forum highlighted the need for consistent frameworks around defining and measuring multicultural populations, so as to highlight the breadth and diversity of this population. The last time the ABS created practice guidelines for measuring multicultural communities was in the 90s, and research has demonstrated that these principles are not being used consistently across different sectors. How do we collectively begin a conversation about these discrepancies? Whose responsibility should this be?



- Consider intersectional frameworks for multicultural communities. In terms of intersectional identities, how might whiteness be a protective factor for different marginalised communities? What could this look like in practice?

### ***The complexity of cultural identity***

- Consider the complexities around how individuals and communities define their cultural identity, outside of countries or languages spoken. Reflect on how even members from the same cultural or linguistic community may have a number of other factors that they use to define themselves. How can you start making space for people to speak on, and own, these factors?
- Reflect on how cultural changes can be fluid and change over time. How might this affect the way that you seek to measure cultural identity? How does this play out in relation to your work? How can you sustain a continued conversation about this in practical ways?
- Reflect on the way you and your organisation are looking to label or measure someone's cultural identity. What kind of qualitative questions could you ask to explore someone's cultural identity that may be more useful to how they access your, or other, services?
- How can we try to ensure that someone's story feels authentically heard? How do we build safety around this for that person, and the systems that they are in?
- In what ways can we let someone define their own cultural identity and experience?

### ***Creating intentional spaces for thoughtful conversations***

- Could you use our Forum structure to prompt and guide conversations in your own spaces, at home or at work?
  - How can you ensure that people and communities are kept safe in this process?
- How can you capture and feed back these insights that contribute to a broader and ongoing conversation about defining and exploring cultural identity?
- In the process of undertaking projects, how do you seek to define the communities you are working with/for?
  - Are they actively involved in the process of creating this definition, and what it means? How could they be brought meaningfully into the process?
  - How can you acknowledge, and document this process to ensure that those who read it understand the intentional approach behind it? Are you able to link this to broader work and research within the sector to ensure building on existing community wisdom?



## To conclude & reflect

We hope that the process, content and themes arising from our Language Forum prompt an opportunity to critically and meaningfully reflect on how we define diverse communities. In providing a space to further expand on these we want to encourage reflective conversations in the spaces we live and work in. We also hope they give you a chance to deepen relationships and relational understanding about how we can work towards a more intersectional and inclusive mental wellbeing sector, and society.

We know this is simply the beginning of the conversation, and look forward to having you join us as we continue to reflect on how we; our communities, our systems and ourselves; can define who we are.



# Appendix 1 - Questions & Content from the Forum

## **Question 1:**

On the sheets in front of you are ways in which culturally diverse communities are often defined or named - for example by the government, organisations, researchers or other groups. Do you relate to these, or would you use any of these to describe your own communities?

- ❖ For example - CALD, Refugee & Migrant Background, Multicultural, NESB (Non-English Speaking Background), Culturally diverse, POC/BIPOC etc., Transcultural, Polycultural, Global majority, Culturally marginalised and racialised communities, CARM (culturally and racially marginalised), others...

### ***Follow up questions:***

- ❖ Are there any labels/names not on this list that might better describe you or your community?
- ❖ Are there positives or negatives relating to any of these labels or names?
- ❖ For many people in the room - you might come from a country where you were part of the majority, has this feeling or sensation changed since coming to Australia? (Given that in Australia, we are considered the minority...)

## **Question 2:**

Now that we have talked a bit about how we define ourselves, how do you think governments, organisations or other groups define our cultural communities? Is this the same or different to the ways in which we name ourselves?

### ***Follow up questions:***

- ❖ Why might it be important to have a label for government or research needs?
- ❖ Are there benefits or consequences to these groups using labels in these ways?

## **Question 3:**

How do you think we should measure culture?

- ❖ For example, are there things other than the 'country of birth' or 'languages spoken' that are better suited?
- ❖ This might include things like socio-economic background, in-direct cultural background (for example, your parents were born in another country to you), decolonial practice (see below) etc.?

### ***Follow up questions:***

- Do these, along with other factors, also impact on your sense of identity? For example, more or less than the 'labels' we have already spoken about before?
- How do you want these different intersecting parts of your identity acknowledged & responded to?
- How might your understanding of this change in different contexts?

***Direct, de-identified responses to these questions can be provided on request.***



# Appendix 2 - Glossary of Terms for base understanding

## CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse)

- MYAN's Census report (2014) defines 'CALD background' as 'anyone born in a CALD country (based on a list of defined countries), if they have at least one parent born in a CALD country, or if they self-identify a CALD country of ancestry'.
- The AIHW (2018) uses a narrower definition of CALD: 'People who were born overseas, have a parent born overseas or speak a variety of languages' (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare., 2018).
- The Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, describe CALD populations as those other than the Anglo-Celtic majority (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia., 2020).
- Ethnic Communities Council Victoria 2012: 'A broad term used to describe communities with diverse languages, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, traditions, societal structures and religions'.

## Refugee & Migrant Background

- 'Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalised violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection. The refugee definition can be found in the 1951 Convention and regional refugee instruments, as well as UNHCR's Statute' - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- 'While there is no formal legal definition of an international migrant, most experts agree that an international migrant is someone who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status. Generally, a distinction is made between short-term or temporary migration, covering movements with a duration between three and 12 months, and long-term or permanent migration, referring to a change of country of residence for a duration of one year or more' - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- 'So, at UNHCR we say 'refugees and migrants' when referring to movements of people by sea or in other circumstances where we think both groups may be present – boat movements in Southeast Asia are another example. We say 'refugees' when we mean people fleeing war or persecution across an international border. And we say 'migrants' when we mean people moving for reasons not included in the legal definition of a refugee. We hope that others will give thought to doing the same.' - Adrian Edwards, Geneva UNHCR.

## Multicultural/Culturally diverse/Transcultural

- Multicultural according to Cambridge Dictionary: 'Relating to a number of different cultures, esp. to the traditions of people of different religions and races.'
- 'Cultural diversity is synonymous with multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica as, "the view that cultures, races, and ethnicities, particularly those of minority groups, deserve special acknowledgment of their differences within a dominant political culture' - UOPeople Arabic.
- Transcultural according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary: 'Involving, encompassing, or extending across two or more cultures.'



## Polycultural

- 'Polyculturalism is defined as the belief that cultures change constantly through different racial and ethnic groups' interactions, influences, and exchanges with each other and, therefore, are dynamic and socially constructed rather than static.' - Rosenthal, Levy & Militano (2014).
- 'Polyculturalism is the belief that cultural groups are interconnected and mutually influencing each other due to past and present interaction' - Frontiers.
- Polyculturalism 'is an ideological approach to the consequences of intercultural engagements within a geographical area which emphasises similarities between, and the enduring interconnectedness of, groups which self-identify as distinct, thus blurring the boundaries which may be perceived by members of those groups. - Wiktionary.

## NESB (Non-English Speaking Background)

- People whose first language is not English.

## POC/BIPOC

- POC - 'Person/people of colour' - a person whose skin pigmentation is other than and especially darker than what is considered characteristic of people typically defined as 'white' : a person who is of a race other than white or who is of mixed race' - Merriam Webster Dictionary.
- BIPOC - 'Acronym that stands for "Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour, it is person-first language. It enables a shift away from terms like "marginalised" and "minority." These terms might remain factually correct, but they lack a sense of humanity, since there's no clear indication they refer to people. As such, they're generic, inadequate descriptors that also carry a suggestion of inferiority and of being "less than" the group that's not in the minority.
- "BIPOC" emphasises, more specifically than the term "People of Colour," the following:
  - People of Colour face varying types of discrimination and prejudice.
  - Systemic racism continues to oppress, invalidate, and deeply affect the lives of Black and Indigenous people in ways other People of Colour may not necessarily experience.
  - Black and Indigenous individuals and communities still bear the impact of slavery and genocide.
  - In other words, the term aims to bring to centre stage the specific violence, cultural erasure, and discrimination experienced by Black and Indigenous people. It reinforces the fact that not all People of Colour have the same experience, particularly when it comes to legislation and systemic oppression.

## Decolonisation/Decolonial Practice:

- Decolonization or decolonisation is the undoing of colonialism, the latter being the process whereby imperial nations establish and dominate foreign territories, often overseas. This includes economic, cultural and psychological aspects of the colonial experience. - Wiktionary.
- Decolonization refers to 'writing back' against the ongoing colonialism and colonial mentalities that permeate all institutions and systems of government, according to Eric Ritskes, editor of Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society. Indeed, decolonization demands an Indigenous framework and a centring of Indigenous land, Indigenous sovereignty, and Indigenous ways of thinking, write Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang in their essay "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor". - Racial Equity Tools.

