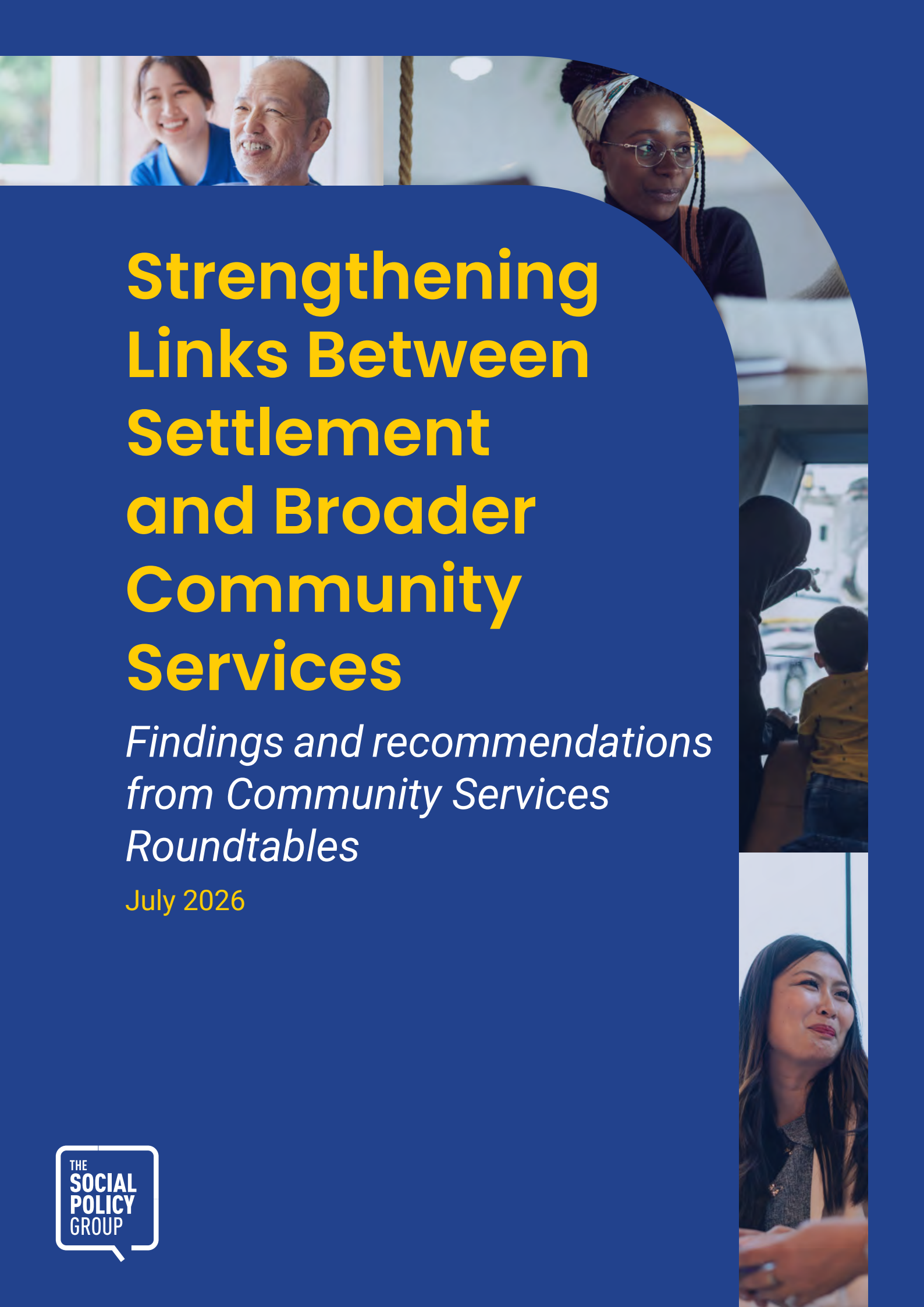




Strengthening Links Between Settlement and Broader Community Services

*Findings and recommendations
from Community Services
Roundtables*

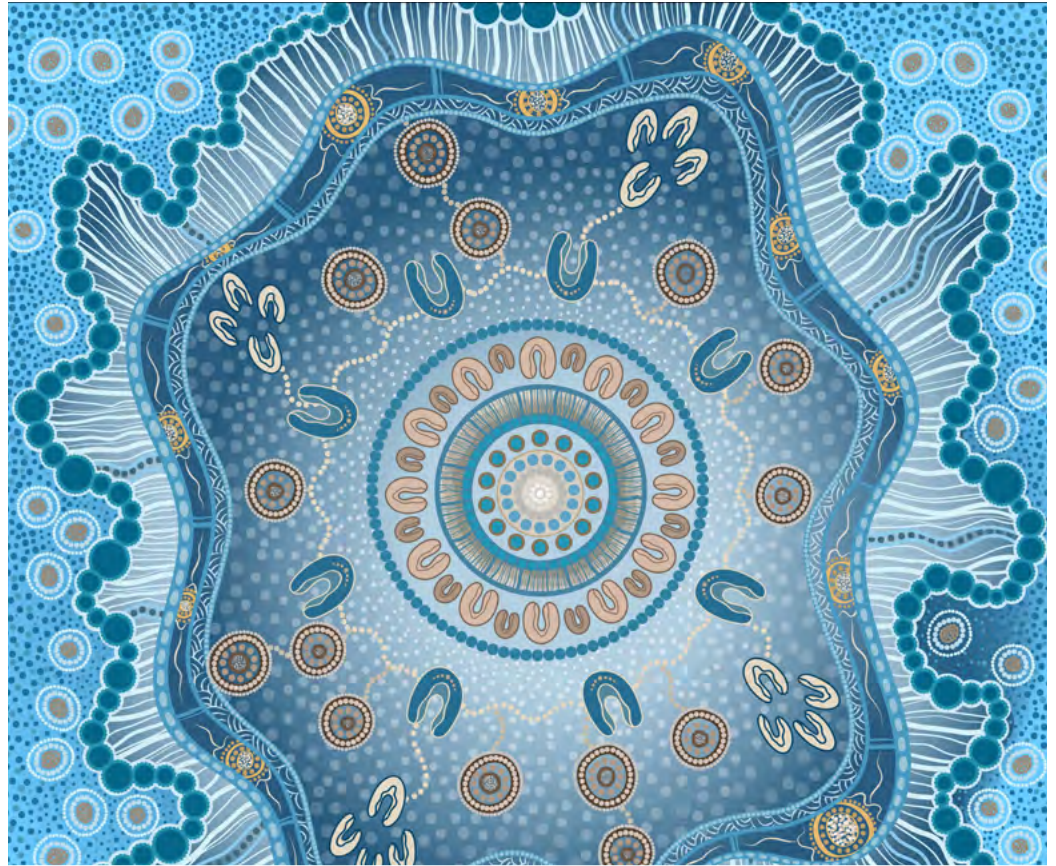
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Acknowledgements



Acknowledgement of Country

The Social Policy Group acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Peoples and the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we live and work across Australia.

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the land on which our offices are situated.

We extend our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia, past and present. We recognise First Nations' ongoing resilience, strength, and stewardship of the land and commit ourselves to ongoing efforts of reconciliation, understanding, and collaboration.

By Eddie Longford, Indigenous Contemporary Art, ACT

From the artist: The design tells the story of the Social Policy Group, how it works to link diverse voices and communities with government, while also representing its values of connection and collaboration.

At the centre, a circle represents government, surrounded by u-shapes for people. The Social Policy Group, facing outward, acts as the bridge and protector, connecting communities to policy. The outer u-shapes represent the voices the Social Policy Group works with, linked by a connection line.

The Brindabella Mountains, Murrumbidgee River, and sky form the outer layers, symbolising connection to country, with Mother Earth as the deism protecting and embracing the organisation.

Acknowledgement and Thank you

The Social Policy Group thanks and acknowledges the organisations, government representatives, practitioners and individuals who contributed to the National and Victorian Community Services Roundtables in May and June 2026, as well as the SETSCoP members who shared their insights through the October and November 2025 State and Territory Forums.

Their time, knowledge and expertise, and above all their commitment to improving the systems that support Australia's diverse communities, made this work possible. Their honest reflections capture both the realities of delivering services and the experiences of people from refugee and migrant backgrounds navigating those systems across Australia.

Organisations represented at the Community Service Roundtables

54 Reasons	Jesuit Refugee Service	SafeChoices – CatholicCare	Wellsprings for Women
ACON	Launceston Community Legal Centre	Sureway Employment & Training	WISE
AMES Australia	Mission Australia	TasTAFE	Woden Community Service
Australian Red Cross	Multicultural Services Centre of WA	The Centre for Women and Co.	Women's Legal Service Queensland
Bendigo Community Health Services	MYAN NSW	The Neighbourhood Hub	Women's Legal Service Tasmania
Berry Street	New England Family Support Service	The University of Melbourne	Zonta House Refuge Association
CASS	No to Violence	The Water Well Project	
Centre for Multicultural Youth	Orygen	Victoria Legal Aid – Migration Program	
Chisholm Institute	Penrith Women's Health Centre	WAAC and Srikandi Women's Action Network	
Foundation House	Polaron Connect	Welcoming Australia	
Huon Refugee Support Group Inc			

Organisations represented at the 2025 SETSCoP State and Territory Forums

54 Reasons	Chinese Community Social Services Centre Inc	Melbourne Polytechnic	Orange City Council
Accessible Diversity Services Initiative	Chisholm Institute	Melkite Charitable Foundation	Pilbara Community Legal Services
Advance Diversity Services	Circle Green Community Legal	MercyCare	QPASTT
Afghan Women's Organisation Victoria	City of Casey Council	Metro Assist	RAILS
African Sub-Sahara International Development Agency	CMY	MiCare	Services Australia
African Women's Federation of SA	Communicare	Middle Eastern Community Council of SA	South East Community Links
AMES Australia	Community Action Gympie	Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne)	South West Healthcare
Anglicare SA	CORE Community Services	Migrant Resource Centre Tasmania	Southern Migrant and Refugee Centre
Arabic Welfare	Cultura	Mosaic Multicultural Connections (Northern Settlement Services)	Spectrum
Asian Women at Work	Drummond Street Services / QueerSpace	Mount Druitt Ethnic Communities Agency	SSI
ASeTTS	ECCNSW	Multicultural Australia	STARTTS
Assyrian Resource Centre	Edmund Rice Centre WA	Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra	St Vincent de Paul Society
Australian Migrant Resource Centre	Gippsland Multicultural Services	Multicultural Families Organisation	Sydney Multicultural Community Services
Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights	Intereach	Multicultural Futures WA	SydWest Multicultural Services
Australian Red Cross	Iranian Community Organisation	Multicultural NSW	Thriving Multicultural Communities
Australian Refugee Association	Islamic Women's Association of Australia	Multicultural Services Centre WA	Toowoomba Refugee and Migrant Services
Brotherhood of St Laurence	Kateb Hazara Association	Multicultural Youth of SA	United Women's Association
Cambodian Australian Welfare Council of NSW	Latin American Society of SA	Multilink	Uniting Communities
CASS	Latrobe Community Health Service	Muslim Women Australia	Uniting VIC / TAS
CatholicCare Tasmania	Lebanese Muslim Association	Muslim Women Australia of SA	Welcoming Australia
Centacare Far North Queensland	LocalKind Northern Beaches	MYAN Australia	Wellsprings for Women
	LWA	MYAN NSW	Whittlesea Community Connections
	MCC Brisbane	Nambour Community Centre	Workforce Australia
	MCC Gold Coast		Wyndham CEC
	Melaleuca Australia		

1. Executive Summary

Refugee and migrant settlement does not occur through one service, one program, or one moment in time. As people build their lives in Australia, they move through multiple service systems including health, housing, education, employment, legal assistance, domestic and family violence, disability, and settlement support. Effective connections between these systems help people access the right support at the right time.

In October and November 2025, the Social Policy Group (SPG), a national settlement peak body, brought together more than 150 settlement practitioners across six jurisdictions through the SETSCoP State and Territory Forums. Participants identified fragmented referral pathways, barriers to interpreter access, inconsistent cultural responsiveness, unclear service roles, and insufficient connections with some broader community and specialist services.

To add perspectives from across the broader service system, SPG convened the National and Victorian Community Services Roundtables in May and June 2026. The roundtables brought together 63 participants from 46 organisations and services, working with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

The roundtables also highlighted a mismatch between how services are structured and how people experience their needs. People may require support across several service systems at once, yet eligibility requirements, service capacity, waitlists, interpreter barriers, and limited regional services can prevent appropriate referrals from resulting in effective support.

Participants shared effective approaches, including co-location, community outreach, local networks, direct referral contacts, joint appointments, and warm handovers. However, these practices often relied on individual workers, local relationships, and informal knowledge rather than being embedded within organisations and service systems.

Across the forums and roundtables, participants called for stronger cross-sector coordination, clearer service roles and referral pathways, better information sharing, improved interpreter access, current local service mapping, culturally responsive practice, and warm, consent-based handovers supported by follow-up.

Based on these findings, SPG has developed two sets of recommendations:

Sector and practice recommendations

- 1 Develop two-way cross-sector briefings on programs, services, eligibility, and referral pathways between settlement and community services.
- 2 Create practical warm referral and handover tools.
- 3 Strengthen local service mapping and keep it current.
- 4 Build and maintain cross-sector relationships at multiple levels.
- 5 Support broader community services to strengthen culturally responsive practice.

Policy and funding recommendations

- 6 Recognise and fund coordination as a core component of service delivery.
- 7 Improve interpreter access, quality, and accountability.
- 8 Address eligibility and service gaps affecting people excluded from existing programs.
- 9 Invest in place-based coordination models.
- 10 Strengthen cross-government coordination between settlement and broader service systems.

Together, these recommendations provide a framework for strengthening the connections between settlement and broader service systems. They recognise that better outcomes depend not simply on generating more referrals, but on building coordinated, accessible, culturally responsive, and adequately resourced systems that reflect the overlapping and non-linear ways people seek and receive support.

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2. Overview

Why this work was undertaken

Refugee and migrant settlement cannot happen through specialist settlement services alone. As people build their lives in Australia, they engage with a broad range of service systems, including health, housing, education, employment, legal, domestic and family violence (DFV), disability support, and other systems.

During the October and November 2025 SETSCoP State and Territory Forums,¹ SPG brought together more than 150 settlement practitioners across six jurisdictions to examine connections between settlement services and broader community services.

Forum participants identified recurring challenges, including:

- fragmented referral pathways
- barriers to interpreter access
- inconsistent cultural responsiveness
- unclear roles and responsibilities
- weaker connections with some broader community or specialist service systems.

Participants also highlighted the need for a national agenda to strengthen connections between settlement and 'mainstream' or broader community services. Suggested approaches included sector-specific deep dives and cross-sector training in priority service areas.

To complement these perspectives, SPG convened the National and Victorian Community Services Roundtables in May and June 2026. The roundtables sought insights from broader community services that work with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

These services may refer people to settlement services, receive referrals from settlement services, or support people who are not eligible for Australian Government-funded settlement programs. Together, the forum and roundtable findings provide a fuller picture of how connections and referral pathways operate across the service system.

What we mean by settlement and broader community services

In this brief, settlement services refer to specialist supports for refugees, humanitarian entrants, and eligible migrants. These include Australian Government-funded programs such as:

- the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP)
- the Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program (SETS)
- the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP)
- Youth Transition Support (YTS)
- the Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration (EPRI) Program

Broader community services are the wider services people may engage with during and beyond their initial settlement journey. These include services not specifically funded to support refugee and migrant settlement but support people from refugee and migrant backgrounds as part of the broader communities they serve.

1. Access the SETSCoP State and Territory Meetings Summary Report: October – November 2025, here: <https://members.setscop.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/SETSCoP-State-and-Territory-Summary-Report-Oct-Nov-2025-18122025.pdf>

About the roundtables

In May and June 2026, SPG convened the National and Victorian Community Services Roundtables with community services, government representatives and organisations working alongside settlement services. Discussions examined how referrals, partnerships, and service pathways operate in practice.

Participants were invited through direct outreach, stakeholder networks, social media, and SPG's peak body channels, including the SETS Insider News, and the Migrant and Refugee Health Partnership newsletters.

The roundtables did not represent every jurisdiction, locality or service area. SPG nevertheless sought a broad mix of organisations across service systems and jurisdictions with particular attention to priority areas such as DFV, youth, health and mental health, housing, legal assistance, education, employment, LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and disability services.

Discussions explored:

- existing links, referral pathways, and handovers
- access barriers and points at which referrals break down
- examples of effective collaboration, partnerships, and place-based approaches
- priorities for strengthening coordination.

The National Roundtable examined the broader national context for connections between settlement and broader community services. The Victorian Roundtable provided a place-based view of local referral pathways, relationship-based practice, and coordination challenges.

A total of 63 practitioners participated in the roundtables, representing 46 organisations and services.

The number of participants working across Australia, included:

- 26 from Victoria
- 10 from New South Wales
- Eight from Tasmania
- Six from Queensland
- Five from the Australian Capital Territory
- Five from Western Australia
- Three working nationally or across multiple jurisdictions

A clear message from both roundtables was that effective coordination cannot rely on goodwill alone. Strong relationships, service navigation, culturally responsive practice, information sharing, and warm handovers require time, funding, practical tools, and workforce capability.

When relationships are strong, people are more likely to trust the service to which they are referred, and practitioners can coordinate support more effectively. When these connections are disrupted by staff turnover, service pressures, unclear eligibility requirements, or poor interpreter access, people may need to repeat their experiences, disengage, or miss needed support.

Delayed access to support can also allow issues to escalate, increasing pressure on stretched services. By contrast, early and coordinated intervention can prevent harm and reduce the need for more intensive intervention.

These findings reinforced those of the October-November 2025 SETSCoP State and Territory Forums. Organisations from both sides of the service relationship identified many of the same barriers.

3. Key Findings

3.1 Strong practice exists, but links may be dependent on individual relationships

What is working

Across both roundtables, participants described many examples of effective collaboration, including:

- **Informal referral pathways:** worker-to-worker referrals through trusted contacts or previous collaboration, even where no formal agreement exists.
- **Co-location:** services working from the same site or regularly attending another service's location, where people can access support in a familiar setting.
- **Local networks:** place-based meetings where services share updates, clarify roles, discuss emerging needs, and build referral relationships.
- **Direct contacts:** named contacts or dedicated inboxes that help practitioners avoid general phone lines and make referrals more quickly and clearly.
- **Joint appointments:** two services meeting with a client together, with consent, to reduce the need to repeat their experiences and clarify each service's role.
- **Service visits:** one organisation visiting another to explain its role, target cohort, eligibility requirements, and referral processes.
- **Community-based outreach:** services providing information, appointments, or support in trusted community settings rather than waiting for people to approach them.
- **Cross-sector briefings:** short, practical sessions that build shared understanding of referral pathways, eligibility requirements, cultural safety, and client needs.
- **Secondary consultations:** practitioners seeking advice from another service about a client's needs, with appropriate consent and without necessarily transferring responsibility for support.

These examples show that effective collaboration is already occurring across service systems. However, participants emphasised that these approaches often depend on individual workers and local knowledge rather than being embedded across organisations.

Where links remain fragile

Opening polls reinforced the central finding that links between community and settlement services exist, but are often dependent on individual relationships rather than embedded within organisational systems.

In the National Roundtable, **39 per cent of respondents described their organisation's links with settlement services as good but dependent on individual relationships**. A further **21 per cent described the links as occasional or informal**. Only **27 per cent described them as strong and consistent**.

A similar pattern emerged at the Victorian Roundtable. Of eight respondents, **50 per cent described their connections as good overall but dependent on individual relationships**, and **25 per cent described them as occasional or informal**.

Roundtable	Main result
National	39 per cent relationship-dependent; 27 per cent strong and consistent
Victorian	50 per cent relationship-dependent; 25 per cent occasional or informal

Note: The opening poll findings are indicative only. They reflect the attendees who responded and the response options provided and should not be interpreted as representative of the wider sector.

This closely reflected SETSCoP forums findings, which also identified relationship-building, warm referrals, staff turnover, and staff onboarding as factors shaping cross-sector connections.

'A huge amount of resource and knowledge sits with individual workers instead of within those systems.'

- Roundtable participant, regional community service, QLD

'You can have a good relationship, then someone leaves, and you know that you have to start over again.'

- Roundtable participant, employment and education service, VIC

Effective coordination is inherently relationship-based. Stronger organisational and systemic arrangements should complement, rather than replace, personal relationships by making them easier to establish, maintain, and carry across staff changes.

These arrangements could include shared contact points, staff onboarding processes, referral protocols, direct email pathways, and introductions between new staff and partner organisations. One Victorian participant described this as a "web" of relationships:

'...Relationships must be at every level, it can't be just one person, the role must be shared. It needs to be like a web, and I think there needs to be funding to support that weathered infrastructure around relationships so that it's built into the role and shared among many... so that those connections don't get lost if someone moves on.'

- Roundtable participant, government and policy, VIC

3.2 People experience the service system as overlapping, not linear

Participants described a mismatch between how services are funded or structured and how people experience their needs. People may require support across housing, income, education, legal issues, DFV, trauma, employment, transport, and English language acquisition at the same time, while services remain separated by program, eligibility requirements, intake processes, or area of need.

Settlement providers may refer people who are ineligible for Australian Government-funded settlement services, including Australian citizens or people on temporary visas, to broader community services. However, these services may also have restrictive eligibility requirements.

When a referral is treated as a simple transfer rather than a shared and supported process, people can be left moving between systems without receiving assistance. This is particularly likely where they do not understand the referral, do not know the receiving service, or later learn that they are ineligible.

'It also speaks to that mindset of thinking that accessing services is just a linear pathway, point A to point B, "we've handed you off to someone else, now we can close our case," and this is obviously not working.'

- Roundtable participant, youth service, VIC

Poor information sharing compounded these problems. Participants reported that people were required to repeat traumatic experiences and navigate multiple services without clarity about which service was responsible for each part of their support.

'...one thing that is very sad when it happens, because organisations offer services that are slightly different... we have these poor people that are being bounced from one service to another... if a solution existed like all of us and settlement services had a way to know exactly who can assist, we could support each other and the clients much more easily.'

- Roundtable participant, legal service, VIC

Referral systems therefore need both relational practice and organisational infrastructure. This includes warm, consent-based handovers and follow-up, supported by clear protocols, shared contact points, and systems that do not depend on one worker.

3.3 Language access remains a structural barrier

Interpreter access and language support were among the strongest themes across both roundtables. Participants described overlapping challenges, including:

- limited availability, particularly for less commonly spoken languages and dialects
- difficulty meeting gender preferences, including requests for a female interpreter for sensitive matters
- privacy and confidentiality concerns, particularly where an interpreter may be known to the client, family, or community
- limited access to face-to-face interpreting where telephone interpreting is not appropriate
- inconsistent interpreter quality, including concerns about accuracy, fluency, and dialect matching
- reluctance among some clients to use interpreters because of previous experiences or lack of trust
- reliance on children, family members, or community members when no suitable interpreter is available
- unclear responsibility for arranging or funding interpreters, including expectations that settlement services will address gaps for broader community services

These concerns arise across service settings, not only in community-based or culturally specific services. In some settings, the interpreter may be the only person who shares the client's language or community background. This can affect trust, privacy, and willingness to disclose sensitive information.

These issues were particularly pronounced in DFV, health, legal, disability, LGBTIQ+, and regional service settings:

'A lot more needs to be done to make sure young people are not stepping into interpretation roles because it's quite intense and some of the conversations are very sensitive... that can put the child in a very compromising position, and a lot of children don't know how to say no.'

- Roundtable participant, local government/community service, NSW

'Without proper interpretation, we end up having three, four, five meetings with the client just to get the most basic information from them.'

- Roundtable participant, community legal service, QLD

SETSCoP forum participants raised similar concerns, including limited interpreter availability, gaps in coverage for less commonly spoken languages and dialects, reluctance or limited capacity among broader community services to use interpreters, and expectations that SETS providers would fill this gap.

Interpreter availability alone is insufficient. Services also need capability to work with interpreters safely and effectively, including responding to gender and dialect preferences, protecting privacy, applying trauma-informed practice, and avoiding reliance on children or family members. Participants noted that some services had no viable alternative in practice.

3.4 Eligibility requirements, waitlists, and funding gaps shape whether referrals result in support

Referral challenges do not always result from weak relationships or unclear pathways. Even when practitioners may identify an appropriate service, waitlists, limited capacity, restrictive eligibility requirements, funding gaps, or a lack of local services can mean that support remains unavailable.

These barriers were especially evident in regional and rural areas, where service availability, transport, face-to-face interpreting and specialist referral options may be limited.

Housing was a recurring example. Participants described people experiencing rental arrears or affordability pressures, misunderstanding notices because of language barriers, and fearing tribunal processes, often with few options once a tenancy had broken down.

People on temporary visas were reported to face some of the most serious gaps. Participants described women experiencing DFV and people experiencing housing instability or financial hardship being excluded from key supports. Community services were left to assemble support through exceptions, philanthropic assistance, or referrals to specialist services with limited capacity.

These examples demonstrate that clearer pathways alone are not enough. A referral cannot result in effective support where the receiving service has diminished capacity or the person does not meet its eligibility requirements.

Services require appropriate funding and capacity, supported by policy settings that enable them to respond when support is needed.

‘We are seeing many more systematic failures that are putting so much pressure on programs... Certain people aren’t eligible for supports because of their visa status so that’s been a massive barrier as well, having people come into our program and there’s so little we can do because they’re not eligible for Centrelink, social housing or transitional emergency housing. They’re really falling into this black zone, and they’re just out there on their own. It’s really devastating to see, you know, people struggling so much and really no avenues for us to explore. And the avenues we do have are just so over exhausted.’

- Roundtable participant, community service, ACT

3.5 Community services need clearer information about settlement programs and service roles

Community services described uncertainty about the role and scope of settlement services. Areas of uncertainty include:

- who is eligible
- when HSP or SETS support ends
- what role settlement providers should play when a client also requires specialist housing, legal, disability, health, employment, or DFV support

This uncertainty can lead to inappropriate referrals, unrealistic expectations, service duplication, or people being referred to settlement providers even when specialist support is required.

One participant highlighted the need to clarify settlement services’ responsibilities where broader services expect settlement practitioners to resolve specialist housing or accommodation needs.

Community service providers likewise wanted the settlement services to better understand their scope, waitlists, funding boundaries, intake requirements, and service limitations.

3.6 Culturally safe and responsive practice extends beyond translated resources and general awareness

Participants described culturally safe and responsive practice encompassing:

- trust
- community connections
- understanding of family and community dynamics
- awareness of fears associated with visa or government authorities
- safe and effective use of interpreters
- responding to trauma with empathy and cultural safety
- understanding when a mainstream or culturally specific service may be safer or more appropriate
- respect for a person's agency and choices about referrals and service providers

Respecting agency includes ensuring that people retain control over referral decisions and can express preferences about the services with which they engage.

For example, in discussions about DFV, some participants described people who did not want to engage with a culturally specific service because they feared community exposure. Others described people who strongly preferred support from a bicultural worker or community-based organisation.

Culturally responsive practice must account for intersecting identities and safety concerns. People with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) may face additional barriers where they do not feel safe in disclosing identity in settlement or community service settings.

Broader LGBTIQ+ service systems may lack cultural and language capability. People may therefore feel they must choose which aspects of their identity or experience they disclose, contributing to fragmented or incomplete service responses.

Proactive outreach can help build trust and support earlier access, particularly where fear of authorities, discrimination, community exposure, or confidentiality concerns may prevent people from seeking help.

'They would not have come by themselves without our promotion.'

-Roundtable participant, legal service, VIC

3.7 What a good referral looks like

Participants described an effective referral or handover as one that is:

- consent-based
- clear about why the referral is being made
- supported by direct worker-to-worker contact
- transparent about what information will be shared
- clear about what the person may need to explain again
- attentive to safety risks, particularly in DFV contexts
- supported by interpreter access where required
- followed up rather than treated as complete once the referral has been sent
- clear about which practitioner or service is responsible for each part of the person's support

'We usually get in contact first with the organisation, check what the referral process is and try to have a conversation to give context. Then we provide the referral and follow-ups after that.'

- Roundtable participant, youth service, VIC

Warm referrals should not result in the person being overwhelmed by contact from too many services at once. Several participants noted that people can become confused when multiple services contact them without a clear explanation or coordination.

'People just refer out left, right, and centre and that can be really overwhelming for the client.'

- Roundtable participant, community legal service, QLD

4. Recommendations

The recommendations below draw on findings from the National and Victorian Community Services Roundtables and the SETSCoP State and Territory Meetings Summary Report: October – November 2025.

Recommendations 1 to 5 are directed primarily to settlement services and broader community services, peak bodies, and other sector stakeholders. Recommendations 6 to 10 are directed primarily to governments and policymakers at national, state and local levels.

Together, the recommendations provide a framework for the next phase of work. Implementation should build on existing good practice, identify approaches that can be adapted across different contexts, and translate the recommendations into practical actions developed with the sector.

Recommendation 1: Develop two-way cross-sector briefings on settlement service roles, eligibility, and referral pathways

Settlement providers, broader community services, and relevant peak bodies should co-design practical, two-way briefings that strengthen understanding across sectors.

Briefings should cover:

- opportunities for earlier identification and referral, enabling services to respond before issues escalate
- the role and limits of SETS, HSP, and other settlement programs
- program eligibility requirements, including the implications of citizenship and temporary visa status
- the support settlement practitioners can reasonably provide and its limits
- circumstances in which specialist referral is required
- approaches to warm referrals, handovers, and coordinated support

These briefings should operate as a two-way exchange. Settlement services need clear information about the scope, constraints, eligibility requirements, and referral processes of broader community services. Broader community services similarly need clearer information about settlement programs, their roles and eligibility settings.

Recommendation 2: Create practical warm referral and handover tools

Relevant settlement and broader community service peak bodies and providers, with government support, should co-develop practical tools that strengthen referrals and handovers across service systems.

These could include:

- a warm referral template
- a consent and information-sharing guide
- a safe-contact checklist for DFV and other sensitive matters
- a client support map that clarifies which service is responsible for each area of support
- guidance on reducing the need for people to repeat traumatic or sensitive experiences
- guidance for referring clients who may not answer telephone calls, regularly access emails, or understand how service systems operate

Tools should be developed with input from DFV, legal, youth, disability, housing, settlement, and other relevant services to ensure they are safe, practical, and suitable for use across different settings.

Recommendation 3: Strengthen local service mapping and keep it current

Participants consistently emphasised the need for accessible and regularly updated information about service scope, location, eligibility, referral processes, and availability. Static directories are useful when they are easy to navigate and adequately resourced to reflect changes.

SPG should work with relevant sector partners to explore approaches to service mapping that include:

- service scope
- eligibility requirements
- geographic catchment
- referral processes
- direct contact points, where appropriate
- interpreter availability
- capacity to support people on temporary visas
- specialist multicultural, refugee, or migrant service capability

Where local networks, directories, or service guides already exist, new work should avoid duplication and instead help identify, connect, strengthen, and share effective existing models.

Recommendation 4: Build and maintain cross-sector relationships at multiple levels

Responsibility for cross-sector relationships should not sit with one worker. Services should embed relationships across organisational levels, including frontline workers, team leaders, managers, senior leaders, and policy staff.

Practical mechanisms could include:

- regular local inter-agency meetings
- introductions for partner organisations as part of staff onboarding
- shared contact lists maintained by role or function rather than by individual name alone
- cross-sector communities of practice
- networks facilitated by local government or other place-based bodies
- periodic briefings that clarify organisational roles, services, and referral processes

These mechanisms should preserve the value of personal relationships while reducing the risk that service connections are lost when individual staff members leave or change roles.

Recommendation 5: Support broader community services to strengthen culturally responsive practice

Broader community services should be supported to strengthen their capability to work effectively with people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Training, guidance, and practice development should address:

- safe and effective interpreter use
- trauma-informed engagement
- visa-related stress and eligibility barriers
- cultural, faith, family, and community dynamics
- safe, inclusive, and affirming referral pathways for people with diverse SOGIESC
- effective collaboration with bicultural workers
- DFV and coercive control in multicultural contexts
- navigating relevant specialists and broader service pathways

This capability-building should be embedded in organisational policy, workforce development, supervision, and everyday practice rather than treated as a one-off training activity.

Recommendation 6: Recognise and fund coordination as a core component of service delivery

Government funding, contracting, and reporting settings should recognise the time and resources required to build partnerships, participate in networks, maintain referral pathways, coordinate with other services, and support warm handovers.

Effective coordination requires staff time and infrastructure for activities such as warm referrals, co-location, direct contact pathways, service mapping, and joint appointments.

These activities contribute directly to effective service access and outcomes but can be difficult to prioritise where funding and reporting arrangements focus mainly on direct service outputs.

Coordination should therefore be recognised and funded as a core component of effective service delivery, rather than treated as unpaid or incidental work. Funding and reporting should also encourage shared outcomes and collaboration, rather than unintentionally reinforcing duplication, competition, or siloed delivery.

Recommendation 7: Improve interpreter access, quality, and accountability

Interpreter access should be adequately funded and strengthened across broader community and government service systems, particularly in health, legal assistance, DFV, housing, disability, education, and other high-priority settings.

Priorities should include:

- greater availability of interpreters for less commonly spoken languages and dialects
- access to female interpreters or other appropriate matched interpreters for sensitive matters, including women's health and DFV
- access to face-to-face interpreting where telephone or video interpreting is unsuitable
- trauma-informed interpreter practice
- clearer expectations that broader community and government services use and fund their own interpreter pathways
- reduced reliance on children, family members, community members, or settlement practitioners to interpret
- stronger quality assurance, feedback, and complaints mechanisms
- improved capability among services to work with interpreters safely and effectively

Recommendation 8: Address eligibility and service gaps affecting people excluded from existing programs

Participants raised concerns about people who need support but are not eligible for settlement services, income support, housing assistance, or other service programs. This included people on temporary visas, people who have become Australian citizens, and migrants who fall outside SETS eligibility requirements.

Government should examine where eligibility rules and program boundaries create service gaps, particularly in:

- domestic and family violence
- housing and homelessness
- legal assistance
- income support
- mental health
- disability
- youth and education transitions

Government should examine where eligibility rules and program boundaries create gaps and consider appropriate flexibility for people experiencing urgent or significant need, particularly where early support could prevent harm or escalation. This should include both access to settlement programs and the availability of appropriate alternative support through broader community and government service systems.

Recommendation 9: Invest in place-based coordination models

Participants repeatedly identified local networks, council-supported coordination, co-location, and community outreach as effective approaches.

Government should support place-based models that bring together settlement services, broader community services, local councils, community-led organisations, and other relevant stakeholders.

Models should be flexible enough to respond across metropolitan, regional, rural, and remote contexts, recognising that service availability, transport, interpreter access, workforce capacity, and community infrastructure vary significantly between locations.

Recommendation 10: Strengthen cross-government coordination between settlement and broader service systems

The Australian Government should strengthen coordination between the Department of Home Affairs and other relevant Commonwealth, and involve state, territory, and local governments where responsibilities, funding arrangements, and service pathways intersect.

Priority actions should include:

- working with education departments and relevant education bodies to strengthen connections between settlement services, schools, and educators
- working with the Department of Social Services and state and territory governments to identify eligibility gaps and people who fall between program boundaries
- addressing recurring systemic issues across housing, health, disability, DFV, legal assistance, employment, education, and other priority service areas
- improving alignment between policy, funding, eligibility, and referral settings where divided responsibilities create gaps or unclear pathways
- establishing mechanisms through which recurring cross-sector issues can be identified, escalated, and addressed across jurisdictions

5. Conclusion

The Community Services Roundtables confirmed that many community services across Australia are deeply committed to supporting people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Participants shared effective approaches to collaboration, community outreach, local networks, warm referrals, and culturally responsive practice.

However, these efforts often depend on individual workers, informal contacts, and local goodwill. People can fall between settlement and broader community service systems when relationships are not embedded across organisations, interpreter access is inadequate, eligibility requirements are unclear, or services lack capacity.

The priority is not simply to generate more referrals but to build better-connected service systems through clearer roles, stronger local relationships, funded coordination, practical referral and handover tools, culturally responsive services, and policy settings that reflect overlapping non-linear needs.

The roundtables and SETSCoP forum findings will inform SPG's ongoing sector engagement, co-development of resources, policy advice, and coordination activities.



About Us

The Social Policy Group (SPG) is a trusted partner of government, community leaders, and service providers with a proven track record of delivering impactful and responsive social policy solutions for Australia's communities. As a peak body for settlement, multicultural health, and multicultural affairs, and a recognised leader in best practice and thought leadership across areas such as gender equality, economic analysis, access to justice, and community sector capacity building, SPG plays a pivotal role in fostering equitable social policies through facilitation, evidence-based practice, and collaborative partnerships.

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