



MARSS

MULTICULTURAL WOMEN'S SUMMIT

REPORT 2022

10th June 2022
Canberra, Australia



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Acknowledgement of Country

MARSS wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work, the Ngunnawal People. We acknowledge and respect past and present Traditional Custodians and Elders of the ACT and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and language practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Foreword

The experiences of women migrating to Australia and settling in the ACT are unique and diverse. However, it can be difficult for many culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women, particularly those recently arrived in Australia, to access opportunities to directly communicate with service providers and policy makers about the challenges they face and the support that they need to begin to participate socially and economically in the Canberra community.

The key purpose of the MARSS' Multicultural Women's Summit was to hear these direct perspectives. The Summit was successful in creating a safe space for migrant women to voice issues, concerns, and challenges they face settling in the ACT, as well as to share their ideas for positive change.

A Summit Steering Committee, made up of migrant and refugee women across Canberra, established the following goals for the Summit:

- Provide women in new and emerging communities a voice in shaping their participation as active citizens
- Understand the challenges that multicultural women experience
- Hear ideas for bringing positive change in order to shape the future in a more inclusive manner
- Understand the barriers that prevent women from harnessing their full potential
- Learn from best practice examples and opportunities that strengthen the ability of women to improve their financial literacy gain strategies for inclusion in supportive mental health initiatives
- Strengthen knowledge and connection to service providers that specialise in settlement, housing, healthy relationships, legal support, and domestic and family violence.

Throughout the day my team and I were privileged to listen to the thoughts, experiences and views of 150 CALD women living in the ACT. There was consistently clear messaging from participants about the key areas of focus for service providers, support organisations and governments working together to design and implement effective support for migrant women.

Three of these key areas were:

- **Economic security** – participants explored a range of areas where they felt they needed more support – from tailored English language tuition focused on Australian workplaces, to recognition of existing qualifications, to more paid work experience opportunities. There was discussion about the unaffordability of childcare to facilitate employment and cultural awareness training to increase community support for women seeking and gaining employment.
- **Housing** – the lack of access to public housing, the lack of affordable private rental properties in the ACT, and minimal support in finding these properties was a consistent message heard throughout the day.
- **Mental Health** – the need for quicker access to torture and trauma counselling, the impacts of an uncertain visa status on mental health, the impacts of economic insecurity – which not only impacts mental health but also affects women's ability to seek help and support when experiencing domestic or family violence.



I encourage you to read more about these discussions and other key issues in the report below.

At MARSS we strive to ensure that the programs and services we design and deliver are directly informed by our clients. Culturally appropriate and accessible consultation is critical to designing and implementing settlement support that successfully meets our clients needs. We hope that by sharing this report, all migrant and settlement sector stakeholders can draw on the information to work together cooperatively to support new and emerging communities in the ACT. And, in particular, to support migrant women – the successful settlement and integration of migrant women into Canberra’s community is critical to the successful settlement of migrant families for generations to come.

Dewani Bakkum AM
MARSS Chief Executive Officer



Introduction

The Multicultural Women's Summit was hosted by MARSS at the Ann Harding Conference Centre, University of Canberra on Friday 10 June 2022. Over 200 women attended including government representatives, peak women's organisations, service providers, community leaders and community women from a breadth of communities represented across the ACT.

The first of its kind, the summit brought together women from across Canberra's diverse communities to discuss issues that matter to them and seek ideas to address these. Women also had the opportunity to connect with settlement sector representatives, service providers and government representatives to share experiences and challenges they face as part of the settlement process.

Multicultural Women's Summit Aims

The purpose of MARSS' Multicultural Women's Summit was to give migrant women the opportunity

to voice the issues, concerns, and challenges they are facing in the ACT, as well as sharing their ideas

for bringing about positive change. A Summit Steering Committee, made up of migrant and refugee women across Canberra, was established to identify the summit goals and themes with a focus on the role of multicultural women in helping shape a better, fairer Australia.

The Multicultural Women's Summit goals were to:

- Provide women in new and emerging communities a voice in shaping their participation as active citizens
- Understand the challenges that multicultural women experience
- Hear ideas for bringing positive change in order to shape the future in a more inclusive manner
- Understand the barriers that prevent women from harnessing their full potential

- Learn from best practice examples and opportunities that strengthen the ability of women to improve their financial literacy Gain strategies for inclusion in supportive mental health initiatives
- Strengthen knowledge and connection to service providers that specialise in settlement, housing, healthy relationships, legal support, and domestic and family violence.

Key themes for discussion identified by the Summit Steering Committee included:

- Mental health
- Financial Literacy
- Settlement challenges around family violence, legal rights and housing

Opening

The Multicultural Women's Summit was opened with a Welcome to Country by Ngunnawal Elder Auntie Violet Sheridan and a captivating performance by the Wiradjuri Echoes.

Morning Session

Key government representatives attending the summit included:

- Alicia Payne MP, Federal Member for Canberra
- Minister Yvette Berry, Deputy Chief Minister
- Jayne Bryant, Department of Home Affairs, Senior Director for the Office of the Coordinator-General for Migrant Services
- Sanzida Akhter, ACT Housing: Senior Director for Housing & Homelessness Strategy & Policy
- Nicole Lawder MLA, ACT Shadow Minister for Women
- Jo Clay MLA
- Dr Marisa Paterson MLA



Guest Speakers

The morning session involved presentations from key government representatives who shared their visions for a multicultural and inclusive ACT where all women feel a sense of belonging and have opportunities to participate and thrive.

His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

Welcome

I'm sorry that I cannot be with you in person for MARSS' inaugural Multicultural Women's Summit. I'm proud to serve as Patron of MARSS and to support the important work of Dewani and the team.

I was particularly delighted to appoint Dewani as a Member of the Order of Australia and to present her with the insignia of her appointment at a special ceremony at Government House in May. She – and the entire MARSS team – make our community a better place.

Australia is one of the most multicultural societies on earth. We come from different backgrounds, yet we are one nation and we are all Australians.

Our diversity is one of our greatest strengths. We are at our best when we are inclusive, respect each other and celebrate the fact that everyone can belong in our great country. We recognise that it is through both our differences and common values that we are Australian.

I acknowledge the important role that MARSS, and similar organisations across the country, play in helping people settle here.

I can only imagine the range of emotions and feelings when you settle into a new way of life in Australia. No doubt there are lots of challenges, unknowns and mixed feelings. Hopefully, as well, there is optimism and excitement about being part of Australia.

Regardless of the circumstance, MARSS is there to help. That is why I'm proud to be involved with them and am so grateful for their work.



We're not perfect, but we are a good country. Australians are kind, compassionate and welcoming – you are each an important part of that culture and you have strengthened our community.

Enjoy the Summit. I'm sure the topics covered will be informative and I look forward to hearing of the outcomes.





Alicia Payne MP

Federal Member for Canberra

Alicia Payne MP, Federal Member for Canberra spoke about multiculturalism as one of Australia's greatest strengths and commended the work of MARSS in helping new arrival communities to engage in civic, social and economic life in the ACT.



Nicole Lawder MLA

ACT Shadow Minister for Women

Nicole Lawder MLA, ACT Shadow Minister for Women spoke about migrant women as contributing great strength to Canberra and her aspiration for more women from multicultural communities to be represented in government.



Jayne Bryant

Department of Home Affairs

Jayne Bryant, Department of Home Affairs, shared key commitments of the new federal government to improve programs and initiatives aimed at supporting effective settlement of new arrival communities.



Hangama Obaidullah

Hangama Obaidullah, Lived Experience - Women's Settlement in Australia Hangama generously shared her own settlement experience describing that in Australia she has found a place where there is potential to achieve her goals. Hangama is building a career in the arts and sees the arts as a critical space to connect with community and reduce isolation. She is using her art to bring about positive change and inspire other women.

"Art allows us the ability to raise awareness. I want to inspire women to be more courageous about their lives."

Theme: Mental Health

The discussion on mental health was introduced with a presentation by Dr Judy Tang, Clinical Neuropsychologist.

Dr Tang highlighted that depression and anxiety were not an uncommon issue in the migration experience as individuals and families are adapting to multiple changes in the way they know the world. She also urged that the stigma around talking about mental health needs to change.

“Peer and social support groups are critical. Social connection is critical. We can all advocate for good mental health.”

Dr Tang explained that mental health is exacerbated by family difficulties, unemployment, financial issues and challenges being experienced by children. She explained that mental and physical health are connected.

“Strategies to improve mental health include daily routines, sleep, and eating well.”

“A good way to start the conversation in your communities is to start by talking about the physical symptoms. These might include headaches, trouble breathing, not eating or sleeping well.”

Following the presentation, participants were invited to discuss the issue with their table group.

They were given two questions to guide discussion:

1. What are the issues for you and women in your community regarding mental health?
2. What would you like to see happen to address these issues?

Issues regarding mental health

Feedback provided by participants suggested that mental health and financial challenges were interwoven.


“The major reason for mental health issues in our community is money.”

Key factors contributing to mental health issues are set out below.

Housing

“We want decent housing.”

- There is limited access to suitable and affordable housing.
- Families are spending well over 60% of their weekly budget on rental.
- Families with up to seven people are living in two bedroom housing
- Most are in housing located further than 20 km from the city. This distance escalates transport costs and limits access to education and employment.



“A big part of our budget goes towards transport to get the children to school and attend English classes.”

“My kids can’t go to early learning because transport costs are too expensive.”

“We have to wake up at 5am just to be able to get to school.”

- Families are struggling to access and afford the private rental market, especially when they have no rental history.
- Applications to Housing ACT do not receive responses.

“Housing support and even access takes months and years. In the meantime our situation deteriorates.”

Isolation

- Living in regional areas where housing is more affordable is isolating.
- Limited finances prevent women from travelling into the city to pursue employment pathways

“Isolation is exacerbated by language barriers but you can’t learn English if you’re isolated.”

- Separation from family overseas compounded by fears for their safety

“My depression is related to worry about my family that is stuck in a war ravaged country.”

Cost of living

- Women cannot afford driving lessons or the costs involved in getting a license
- Accessing education pathways is cost prohibitive and further limits pathways to employment

Unemployment

- Employers want local experience
- Overseas qualifications and experience are not recognised

“The impact of constant refusal of employment is that our mental health diminishes”





Insecure residency status

A number of participants were on Temporary Protection Visas (TPV). One participant shared that she had been on a TPV for 10 years. Ongoing insecurity around residency status prevented women from planning their future and required living with constant fear. This was identified as particularly harmful to mental health.

Additional issues raised in relation to mental health included:

- Language barriers restrict ability to participate and this in turn leads to isolation and lessening of confidence.
- The length of time it takes to get permanent residency affects wellbeing and the ability to engage in society. It is not possible to access most jobs without permanent residency.
- Lack of knowledge about legal rights including the right to live free from family violence.
- Separation from family.

“Being worried about family. We want solutions to getting family to Australia. Being social and connected to your community builds resilience. Families being left back home is bad for mental health. There is lots of grief associated with this, crying, no sleep, stress.”

“Being away from country and family is hard. You can’t even visit. It’s depressing not knowing anyone or about our new society.”

“There is a constant fear of judgement, not having social groups and feeling inferior.”

“Young people find it difficult to adapt to new education system and integrate and get very depressed.”

“The immigration system is getting very complex and it is very expensive to sit English language test. It can take up to four times to pass.”

Recommendations for addressing mental health

Participants made the following recommendations:

- Improve visa processing wait times so women and their families are better placed to plan for their future.
- Train community leaders and advocates to talk about mental health so it reduces stigma in the community.
- Expand opportunities for social connection. Examples include weekend outings for women and children, events for older women to connect.
- Increase support to access employment and have qualifications recognised. This could include workshops that train people around qualification recognition and applying pre-arrival experience to employment applications.
- Provide subsidised or free driving lessons that will support women to get a driver’s license.



Theme: Financial Literacy

The discussion on financial literacy was introduced with a presentation by Nicole Flaws, Financial Counsellor at Care Financial.

Nicole highlighted issues around gender inequality including that women, on average, earn less than men but make up two thirds of primary carers, 81% of single parent families are headed up by women and women's superannuation is 62.8% lower than men's on retirement.

The presentation acknowledged that life experiences have shaped the financial situation of women and this was exacerbated for migrant women who also experienced language and cultural barriers and under employment.

"Financial independence comes from being financially capable."

Financial capability involved developing financial literacy and budgeting skills. Participants were encouraged to contact CARE Financial which provides support including help to develop a budget, help with debt and financial literacy skills. The service offers free interpreting services to ensure accessibility by non-English speaking communities.

Following the presentation, participants were invited to discuss the issue with their table group.

They were given two questions to guide discussion:

1. What are the issues for you and women in your community regarding financial literacy?
2. What would you like to see happen to address these issues?

Issues regarding financial literacy

Discussions around this theme highlighted that housing and employment were central to economic autonomy, security and a sense of inclusion. Women's contributions to discussion highlighted that many felt they were not yet at the stage of having any financial options to apply financial literacy to.

"We need to have money to be able to budget. When all you have is Centrelink it's hard enough to survive the day. You need a job before you can make decisions about money."

Key issues relevant to financial literacy, as identified by summit participants, are set out below.

Employment Limitations

"We heard Australia is inclusive but we don't experience this. We can only participate equally when there is equal footing."

- Limited employment pathways
- Qualifications and pre-arrival experience are not recognised so women do not have any financial means.
- Many women have been actively seeking employment for lengthy periods without managing to secure any stable work.
- Discrimination is a factor in accessing employment.

Housing

"The process for applying for government housing has a lack of transparency and communication after submitting an application. It is hard to get updates or know you are progressing. You can't get hold of case managers."

- Housing is unaffordable and more so for women who are sole parents or elderly
- Homelessness is increasing and remains hidden as families rely on their communities for shelter

A number of older women attending the Summit indicated that although they had managed to find work and save the deposit for a home, banks refused to offer home loans because of their age.

Childcare

- Childcare costs are not affordable for many new arrival communities
- Without childcare women are not able to seek employment

“Childcare is financial strain on parents, especially women as primary carers. If I can’t access childcare how can I even think about getting a job and having any money to plan for a future?”

Recommendations for addressing financial literacy

Participants made the following recommendations:

- Promote the 8 week work placement with the ACT government to give women Australian based work experience. Many women were unfamiliar with this initiative and although they accepted it was a voluntary based program, they suggested attaching a small payment that would at least cover travel expenses.
- Provide information sessions and supports to enable newly arrived communities to have overseas qualifications and experience recognised.
- Focus English language classes on workplace communication skills.
- Provide access to work experience that develops skills needed for the Australian job market.
- Run regular job expos that help women learn about careers and career pathways.
- Offer workshops for unskilled women to pursue interests such as cooking, handy work, art classes so they can find a passion outside employment.
- Arrange regular sessions with Centrelink representatives to learn about accessing assistance and jobseeker help.

- Run forums where older employed migrants can meet with new migrants to share work pathway experiences.
- Improve access to affordable childcare so women are in a position to access employment. This should include greater subsidies for single mothers who are most isolated and at financial risk.
- Provide internships and traineeships specifically for newly arrived communities in areas that match their pre arrival training and expertise.
- Improve access to affordable housing located at reasonable distance from schools, services and employment.







Theme: Additional Settlement Issues

The final Summit session invited participants to engage in discussion around additional settlement issues. The session opened with a panel of speakers covering topics such as legal rights, housing, settlement support and family and domestic violence.

Rosa Grahame, Program Manager at the Women's Legal Centre, spoke about access to lawyers, social workers and the Health Justice Program. She highlighted the Centre's trauma informed practice, family law focus and work with women on temporary visas.

Sanzida Akhter, Senior Director, Housing and Homelessness Strategy and Policy, ACT Government, spoke about housing and homelessness policies in ACT government and a program specifically designed to support women from multicultural communities.

Sandra Elhelw Wright, CEO Settlement Council of Australia, covered the role of the Council in developing best practice to support effective settlement and spoke about the research and advocacy work of the Council.

Sue Webeck, CEO Domestic Violence Crisis Service, spoke about the Gateway Services 24 hour crisis line, the service's ability to help with groceries, phone credit, housing, hospital etc. They can also support women through the court process. Staff at the Service speak over 18 community languages and also offer a free interpreting service for women.

Anabelle Jeffries Family Counselling Team Leader at Marymead, spoke about the New Horizons outreach counselling service for children which can offer up to a years and can outreach where children are located. They also offer adult individual counselling, the Circle of Security Program and have a Family Services Unit offering post separation counselling.

Following panel presentations, questions were invited from participants. The following key issues were raised.

Housing

Public housing applications take years and there is often no acknowledgment of receipt of an application.

"They collect your documents for application but you don't hear anything up to a year later. It's impossible to even talk to anyone. There is no response to calls or emails."

"The problem is communication. We want to be treated with dignity and respect. When we can't even talk to someone it diminishes our sense of self and we lose faith in the possibility of service access."

Employment

Women felt they were not being given fair access to employment pathways and systemic discrimination prevented their ability to participate in economic life. The heightened expectation of volunteerism was also problematic for a cohort who are already experiencing significant financial stress.

"Our biggest problem is finding a job. People search for any job but it's impossible even with significant qualifications from overseas. We always get asked about local experience. The only offers we get is as volunteers. Even doctors and lawyers get asked to do volunteer work."



"In my home country I had 25 years experience as a pharmacist. Drugs have the same scientific name all around the world and yet I was told I couldn't even be a pharmacist's assistant here because I don't have experience."

"We do exhaustive amounts of volunteerism and still get told we don't have experience."

"We feel let down by Australian employers who refuse to give us a chance."

"You may be proficient enough to get by, but our English is not good enough for 'higher order' things such as meetings, the process to apply for work, and the documentation required."

"Training is needed in how to operate in the workplace in Australia, for example how to run a meeting, how to set an agenda, how to contribute in a meeting. What is the culture and practice of these things in an Australian workplace?"

English language skills

Participants expressed that language barriers were compounded by a lack of knowledge about Australian workplace practices. They hoped for greater targeting of English language classes focused on preparing them for the workplace and wanted to know more about their workplace rights.







His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC, (Ret'd)

Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia



David John Hurley was sworn in as the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 July 2019. David joined the Australian Army in January 1972, graduating from the Royal Military College, Duntroon into the Royal Australian infantry Corps. In a long and distinguished 42-year military career, his service culminated with his appointment as Chief of the Defence Force.

David was born in Wollongong, New South Wales. He grew up in Port Kembla and attended Port Kembla High School where he completed his Higher School Certificate. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the Royal Military College, Duntroon and with a Graduate Diploma in Defence Studies from Deakin University. He is married to Linda with whom he has three children. He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Wollongong; a Doctor of the University, *honoris causa* from the University of New South Wales; made a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering; and awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Macquarie University. Prior to being sworn in as Governor-General, David Hurley served as the 38th Governor of New South Wales from October 2014 - May 2019.

Yvette Berry MLA

Deputy Chief Minister



Yvette Berry is the ACT's Deputy Chief Minister and has responsibility for a wide range of portfolios including Women, Education and Early Childhood Development, and Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. Prior to being elected, Yvette worked in the Hospitality industry and then for United Voice for more than 15 years as a community organiser.

No stranger to grassroots activism, she was a part of the Clean Start campaign which fought to improve working conditions for those in the office cleaning industry and coordinated the BIG STEPS campaign, calling for professional pay for Early childhood Educators. She has lived in Canberra her whole life, residing in West Belconnen. Besides her two kids, she also shares her home with two rescue dogs named Baxter and Cassie, and three chickens (Rosa, Wendy, and Orange).



Alicia Payne MP

Federal Member for Canberra



Alicia Payne is the Federal Member for Canberra, proudly representing the Canberra community since her election in May 2019. Alicia is a strong voice for social justice and urgent action on climate change in the community and the Parliament. Since her election Alicia has been a strong advocate for the Canberra electorate and is proud to represent this progressive and caring community. In the 46th Parliament, Alicia served on the Joint Standing Committees on the NDIS and the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit. She also served as Secretary of the Australian Labor Party First Nations Caucus Committee.

In the current Parliament, Alicia serves as the Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, and as a member of the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics and the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Privileges and Members' Interests. Before her election to the Parliament, Alicia worked as a Research Fellow at the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), a Policy Analyst at the Australian Treasury, a Research Adviser to then Finance Minister Lindsay Tanner MP, Senior Social Policy Advisor to then Leader of the Opposition Bill Shorten MP, and Chief of Staff to then Shadow Minister for Social Services Jenny Macklin MP. Alicia grew up in Canberra and is now raising her two young children there.

Dewani Bakkum AM

MARSS Chief Executive Officer



Dewani has been involved in the community and charitable sectors for the past 30 years in Australia and in Fiji, and has an extensive background in developing and delivering services for disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, with a strong focus on breaking down cultural and linguistic barriers to facilitate settlement and community participation. Migrating to Australia from Fiji in 1982, Dewani has a strong understanding of the migrant experience and a passion for helping migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants to participate in their new communities and to become proud and engaged members of a diverse Australian society. Dewani is passionate about her Fijian heritage, serving as past President, Vice President and Secretary of the Fiji Australia Association of the ACT.

Dewani has qualifications in Community Development, Business Management and Accounting. She has used her skills to provide strong strategic direction, leadership and problem solving capabilities to MARSS as the CEO. She has also previously held positions as Secretary, Deputy Chair and Chair of the MARSS Board of Management. Dewani has served as the Treasurer and Chair of the Settlement Council of Australia. Dewani has also been a member of the ACT Chief Minister's Advisory Committee to the Office of Fair Trading, the Council of Harmony Alliance and the ACT Multicultural Advisory Committee. She currently remains on the board of the Settlement Council of Australia and on the Advisory Committee for Welcoming Cities. Dewani has been awarded the FECCA Multicultural Award and the ACT International Women's Award for Multiculturalism.



Jayne Bryant

Department of Home Affairs

Jayne Bryant works directly to the Commonwealth Coordinator General for Migrant Services and works closely with Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, industry and the community sector.

Working to drive improvements to employment, English language, and broader settlement outcomes while promoting the contribution that migrants, refugees and humanitarian entrants make to Australia. Jayne has over two decades' experience working on the Commonwealth's refugee, humanitarian and settlement programs both internationally and domestically.



Hangama Obaidullah

Hangama came to Australia from Afghanistan as a refugee 2003. At that time she spoke no English, but joined language classes and progressed rapidly.

Hangama has since developed her arts practice in painting, drawing, photography and writing. She moved to Canberra in 2010 where she is currently studying for a Bachelor of Writing at the University of Canberra. Hangama has exhibited in a variety of public venues in Canberra, other Australian cities and internationally.

Hangama's artwork draws on her Afghan heritage, her homeland and its history. Her goal is to assist other women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, through visual arts practicing and writing.



Dr Judy Tang

Clinical Neuropsychologist

Judy Tang is a strong advocate for multiculturalism and LGBTIQ+ communities with expertise in psychology, ageing, research and mental health. With extensive relationships across government and community groups, Judy has volunteered for more than 10 years to promote and advocate for multiculturalism and equality for migrants.

She is a former VMC Multicultural Champion and President of the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council, a national body that advocates for the rights of multicultural and multifaith LGBTIQ+ people and communities. Judy has a doctorate in neuropsychology and is a practicing Clinical Neuropsychologist.

Dr Tang is a current Board Director for the Victorian Pride Centre, and is one of Victoria's 12 Multicultural Commissioners at the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC). Specialities: Lecturing, Guest Lecturing, Training Delivery, Scientific Publications, Research, Neuropsychology assessments, Medico-legal assessments, Brain Rehabilitation, Psychology, Advocacy, Multicultural, LGBTIQ, Mental Health.



Nicole Flaws

Financial Counsellor at Care Financial

Nicole Flaws is a Financial Counsellor at Care Financial Counselling service in the ACT (Ngunnawal Country).

She has been a financial counsellor for about 6 years, and has a special interest in assisting senior Canberrans, survivors of domestic and family violence and clients affected by gambling.

She is a chartered accountant too and prior to financial counselling, she worked as a financial management consultant mostly for government departments. She was lured to financial counselling as she wanted to put some of those financial and people skills to good use to help people overcome their financial issues and also connect more with the issues concerning people in the community. When not at work, you can find her testing out recipes, hiking (while trying to avoid snakes and magpies) or planning the next holiday!



Agata Pukiewicz

Principal Solicitor of Care Consumer Law

Agata Pukiewicz is the Principal Solicitor of Care Consumer Law, leading a small team of lawyers in the ACT providing expert advice in the areas of consumer credit, banking, debt recovery and insurance; and advising consumers subjected to unfair trading practices in the provision of goods and services.

Over the past two decades, Agata has practiced in various roles: a prosecutor, a Legal Aid lawyer, and a principal of community legal centres across three jurisdictions (NSW, NT, and ACT), including work in remote Aboriginal communities, bush courts, mental health wards and prisons. Most of her professional experience involves supporting people affected by family violence, financial abuse, disadvantage, and lacking access to justice.

Agata's life's passion has been fighting for the rights of those less privileged than her, travel, and growing older (and forgetful) in the company of her loving cat, husband, and a dog.



Sandra Elhelw Wright

CEO, Settlement Council of Australia



Sandra is the CEO of the Settlement Council of Australia, the peak body representing Australia's migrant and refugee services. The Council has over 100 member organisations that work with migrants and refugees to build a new life in Australia. In her current role, she advocates for policy changes that build an inclusive society, where migrants and refugees belong and actively contribute. Sandra is a second-generation migrant, whose parents came to Australia from Egypt. Her experience growing up in a migrant family significantly influences her work.

Prior to joining SCOA, Sandra worked in frontline roles supporting migrants and refugees, and managed the delivery of the Humanitarian Settlement Program in the ACT, which works with refugees upon arrival to help them settle in Australia.

She also has a specific interest in gendered issues. She has worked in government, where she progressed law reform in the areas of sexual assault and family violence, and is currently conducting a PhD on domestic and family violence in Australian Muslim communities.

She has always had a strong commitment to communities she belongs to, having sat on a wide range of community boards and advisory committees.

Sanzida Akhter

Senior Director, Housing and Homelessness Strategy and Policy, ACT Government



Sanzida has been serving the ACT community for the last 12 years. Sanzida currently leads the delivery of housing and homelessness strategy and policy in the ACT. Committed to end street homelessness in Canberra, Sanzida and her team are working to deliver on key goals in the ACT Housing Strategy that aim to reduce homelessness and strengthen social housing assistance.

As a South Asian migrant, Sanzida brings diversity of thinking to the role along with an extensive public policy experience. Over her career in the ACT Public Service Sanzida has built numerous multi-disciplinary teams to solve complex problems. Bringing together economic, social, legal and environmental policy frameworks, Sanzida has worked on a diverse range of policy issues including:

- Strategic changes through the ACT Transport Strategy
- Designing a modern waste management legal framework for the ACT, and
- Initial design of a law reform in reducing single use plastic products.

Sanzida is good at bringing together different academic thinking styles to clearly identify problems and deliver pragmatic solutions that result in positive community outcomes. Alongside this, Sanzida is currently undertaking an Executive Masters in Public Administration. She previously studied environmental management, economics, and public policy at the Australian National University.



Sue Webeck

CEO, Domestic Violence Crisis Service



Sue is a LGBTQIA+ community advocate as well as a passionate violence prevention and respectful relationships educator and advocate. She has been working in this space and aligned violence response and primary prevention spaces for almost 20 years having most recently worked at the Australian National University leading their Respectful Relationships Unit prior to taking her current role as CEO of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in June 2021. Sue has contributed to the development of education programs including Oxford University Press program Consent Matters and Griffith University's MATE Bystander program, having developed the LGBTQIA+ module.

Sue is a deeply committed Canberran working and volunteering in a range of roles in the pursuit of making our community safer and more respectful for all. Sue is currently the Chair of the LGBTQIA+ Ministerial Advisory Council and a member of the National Women's Safety Alliance, Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Working Group and Chair of her children's public school board. Sue is a proud Canberran, happily raising her 11 year old twins alongside her wife while learning to live respectfully and in the spirit of reconciliation on Ngunnawal Country.

Annabelle Jeffries

Family Counselling Team Leader, Marymead



Annabelle is a Psychotherapist, specializing in the trauma-focused care of children. She is also a 'Circle Of Security' parenting facilitator and has a keen interest in this style of attachment-based therapeutic support for parents and caregivers.

Annabelle is a passionate advocate for inclusive access to mental health supports for women and non-binary folk, and their children.

Rosa Grahame

Program Manger of Women's Legal Centre's Health Justice Program



Rosa Grahame is the Program Manager of the Centre's Health Justice Program. Rosa joined the Centre in 2018 and went on to successfully establish two Health Justice Partnerships with Calvary Hospital and Gungahlin Child and Family Centre. The Health Justice Program has shaped the Centre's approach to service delivery as a whole and ensures some of our most vulnerable clients can access legal services.

Prior to joining the Centre, Rosa worked at Legal Aid ACT for many years, gaining specialist skills in family law and family violence practice, including litigation. She combines this practice background with her vision for strong, effective partnerships to provide a responsive, wholistic and trauma-informed service to clients.

Rosa is passionate about improving how services respond to family violence and its associated legal complexity via community legal education, information sharing and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Rosa was awarded a BA/LLB from ANU in 2013. She achieved a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice and was admitted in 2014.

MARSS Multicultural Women's Summit – Program

9:00 AM Arrival and Registration

9:30 AM Welcome to Country

Ngunnawal Elder Violet Sheridan

9:40 AM Acknowledgement of Country

'What does it mean to be on colonised land?' By
Wiradjuri Echoes

9:50 AM Welcome from MARSS CEO

Dewani Bakkum AM

Official welcome from MARSS, brief overview and
introduction to the topics

9:55 AM Opening Address 1

His Excellency General the Hon. David John Hurley AC
DSC (Ret'd)

Official pre-recorded video address by the Governor-
General of the Commonwealth of Australia

10:00 AM Opening Address 2

Alicia Payne MP

Opening address by the Federal Member for Canberra

10:10 AM Opening Address 3

Jayne Bryant

Opening address on behalf of the Commonwealth
Coordinator-General of Migrant Services

10:15 AM Lived Experience - Women's Settlement in Australia

Hangama Obaidullah

10:30 AM Traditional Indonesian Dance Performance

10:35 AM Morning Tea- Expo Network

10:50 AM Traditional Indian Dance Performance

11:00 AM Theme: Mental Health Presentation

Dr Judy Tang - Senior Neuropsychologist, Invictus Health

Issues affecting women from multicultural backgrounds
regarding mental health

11:20 AM Roundtable discussions and feedback

Georgia Prattis and Maria Dimopolous – Myriad
Consulting

Tables discuss key issues raised in the presentation, and
their own perspectives on key priorities regarding mental
health

12:00 PM Theme: Financial Literacy Presentation

Nicole Flaws and Agata Pukiewicz - Care Financial

Issues affecting women from multicultural backgrounds in gaining financial literacy

12:20 PM Roundtable Discussions and Feedback

Georgia Prattis and Maria Dimopolous – Myriad Consulting

Tables discuss key issues raised in the presentation, and their own perspectives on key priorities regarding financial independence

1:00 PM Lunch and Expo Network

1:30 PM Theme: Other Key Settlement Issues

Panel Discussion and Q & A session

Georgia Prattis and Maria Dimopolous – Myriad Consulting

The Panel Members:

- Domestic Violence Crisis Service - Sue Webeck
- ACT Women's Legal Centre – Rosa Grahame
- ACT Housing - Sanzida Akhter
- Marymead - Annabelle Jeffries
- SCOA – Sandra Elhelw Wright

2:45 PM Summary of Emerging Recommendations

Georgia Prattis and Maria Dimopolous – Myriad Consulting

3:00 PM Minister's Speech

Minister Yvette Berry, MLA - ACT Minister for Women

3:10 PM Closing Remarks

Dewani Bakkum, AM - MARSS CEO

3:15 PM Multicultural Fashion Show

3:25 PM Visual Summary of the day

3:30 PM Close



Acknowledgements

The success of the Multicultural Women's Summit of MARSS Australia Inc. relied on the support of many people.

MARSS would like to acknowledge the contributions of all stakeholders.

MARSS Multicultural Women's Summit Steering Committee

Nour Asmar – Palestinian Community

Shamaruh Mirza - Bangladesh Community

Juliet Asifiwe – Congo Community

Hangama Obaidullah – Afghan Community

Arezoo Shaifi - Afghan Community

Elena Alvarado Benavides - El Salvadoran Community

Akeer Chutdeng - South Sudanese Community

Multicultural Women's Summit Management

Dewani Bakkum AM – MARSS CEO

Georgia Prattis - Myriad International Consultancy

Maria Dimopolous - Myriad International Consultancy

Andrew Cummings – Andrew Cummings Training and Consultancy

Andrew Kazar – MARSS

Joshua Alexander – MARSS

Eman Basheer – MARSS

Jenna Francis – MARSS

Mona Ismail – MARSS

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This program is supported by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs and the Settlement Council of Australia





