



strategic development group

The Centre, North and West
Melbourne

Community Needs Analysis

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Executive Summary

The Centre is a not-for-profit incorporated charity situated on Errol Street in North Melbourne that was established forty years ago and operates as a neighbourhood house and learn local organisation. It seeks to provide programs and activities that respond to the need and priorities and to enhance the wellbeing of community members of North and West Melbourne.

The **Community Needs Analysis (CNA)** was undertaken for The Centre by an independent consultant between September 2021 and March 2022. The **purpose** of the CNA is to provide information that will inform the development of new and creative ways for The Centre to engage with diverse communities in the suburbs of North and West Melbourne and to better meet their identified priorities and needs.

The Analysis was conducted **in** two phases between September 2021 and February 2022 using **participatory formative enquiry**. Informant interviews, focus group discussions, an online survey and review of census (2016) data and selective review of publicly available documents and records were used as data sources. Consultations took place with a wide and representative range of informants – community members and representatives of organisations.

The impact of **COVID-19** restrictions meant that the timeframe for the Analysis was extended and that Phase one (September to December 2021) interviews were completed remotely. The prominence of COVID impacted on what was heard during consultations, particularly in relation to the recent extreme and sudden lockdowns that some residents in North Melbourne had experienced.

Community Overview

North and West Melbourne has a growing population with growth of resident numbers projected to increase significantly over the short to medium term due to major infrastructure (business and housing) development. An increasing number of younger employed professional people live in the area. Most residents live in private rental properties, with fewer owner occupiers. A smaller number, but significant proportion of people living in public and social housing.

Cultural, language, social and economic diversity are strong community characteristics. This diversity was consistently identified by interviewees. Another strong and recurring positive community characteristic is **connection** between the community members. However, often informants spoke about more **localised connection** between specific groups that is location based or through social, cultural, or language ties.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A framework consisting of different outcome areas related to **individual** – economic participation health and wellbeing, access to learning, local connection (people and place); **community** – empowerment (leadership, voice and access to resources), social cohesion (connection and

participation); and **community located organisations** – coordination and collaboration, was used to guide the data collection and reporting the Analysis findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The critical **conclusions and recommendations** for each of the three levels are:

Individual	
Key Conclusions	Recommendations for The Centre
<p>Keen to engage with The Centre although all had limited or no knowledge of The Centre prior to the Analysis</p> <p>Expressed concern of being (over) consulted by organisations but then not following up with action</p> <p>Seeking a space to meet, socialise and do activities</p> <p>Seeking support to arrange and convene activities – organisation that <i>“does with them but not do for them”</i></p> <p>International students want to mix with other students and wider community</p> <p>Cultural and language groups initially want to engage with their own group</p> <p>All groups identified skills they are keen to share</p>	<p>Arrange follow up meetings with the groups consulted to demonstrate commitment to action</p> <p>Continue to engage in culturally safe and accessible ways with members of CALD groups - i.e. employ bicultural workers and / or volunteers</p> <p>Dedicated resources (staff time, budget) be made available for ongoing community engagement activities to support building mutual understanding, trust and relationships</p>

Community	
Key Conclusions	Recommendations for The Centre
<p>Population growth projected to continue</p> <p>Increasing number of young professional residents</p> <p>Cultural and language diversity an ongoing feature</p> <p>Disparities social and economic will continue</p>	<p>Continue to reach out to different groups in the community in culturally safe and accessible ways</p> <p>Continue to promote the value and benefits of diversity in the community through small scale and larger community located events and activities</p> <p>Keep up to date with the changes in demographics of residents particularly as large-scale housing is built and impacts of COVID long term becomes clearer</p>

Community Organisations	
Key Conclusions	Recommendations for The Centre
<p>Sufficient number and quality of organisations in community</p> <p>Coordination and communication is poor between organisations and with community</p> <p>Competitive more than collaboration between organisations often due to limited funding opportunities</p> <p>Priorities tend to be donor driven more than based on community identified priorities and needs</p> <p>The Centre is not well known by many of the organisations</p>	<p>Increase visibility of The Centre - continue to connect and seek more ways to collaborate with other organisations, and make it a more accessible space</p> <p>Community representation in The Centre - staff, volunteers, governance reflect the diversity</p> <p>Dedicate resources to support meaningful engagement, collaboration that provides the basis and will support genuine codesign and codelivery processes</p>

Acknowledgements

Gratitude is expressed to all the community members of North and West Melbourne who shared their views and ideas about their community for this analysis. Thanks to the staff of community organisations, service providers and of the Melbourne City Council who provided helpful insights and perspectives; the members of the Project Steering Committee who guided the process and drawing on their rich and long experience of the local community;

The Centre staff for their support, particularly Alex Gyles, the Community Development Coordinator who cofacilitated the engagement process. Thanks too to CoHealth for assistance in the recruitment of bicultural workers who helped facilitate positive engagement with members of their communities.



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Background

The Centre

The Centre is a not-for-profit incorporated charity situated on Errol Street in North Melbourne. It was established forty years ago, and today with a team of volunteers and paid staff (8 staff at 3.8EFT) operates as a neighbourhood house and learn local organisation. The Centre seeks to provide programs and activities that respond to the need and priorities and seeks to enhance the wellbeing of community members of North and West Melbourne. The Centre extended its reach to the Docklands by setting up the Docklands Neighbourhood House in 2020.

Purpose

The **Community Needs Analysis (CNA)** provides information that will inform the development of new and creative ways for The Centre to engage with diverse communities in the suburbs of North and West Melbourne and to better meet their identified priorities and needs.

Scope

The Analysis focused on outcome areas for each of the three levels concerned with - individual, the community, and community located organisations.

Individual – the needs, barriers, gaps and the opportunities and potential to:

Economic participation - work related training, work readiness, work retention, financial independence

Health and wellbeing – physical, mental health, nutrition, housing, and freedom from violence

Access to learning – formal and non-formal education and skill

Local connection to place and people - belonging, links and networks- including cultural, language, arts

Community:

Community empowerment – leadership and voice, access to resources (knowledge, skills, resources) and opportunities to influence change and innovate

Social cohesion – connection, participation

Organisations:

Capacity of community organisations – coordination / collaboration between different organisations within and beyond the community sector

Approach

A purposeful analysis was conducted using participatory informative enquiry. Qualitative approaches using key informant interviews, small focus group discussions and a semi structured short survey were employed. Additional information, including service provision and demographic data, was accessed from publicly available sources (referenced in this document) and The Centre's records were reviewed.

All aspects of the analysis – design of tools, engagement, and interpretation of findings were guided by a set of principles:

Appreciative strength-based enquiry that focuses on gaining an understanding of the existing individual and community capabilities and resources that may be accessed

Accessible and inclusive engagement and communication for all by making reasonable and appropriate adjustments to all aspects of the Analysis process

Cultural safety in engagement, ensuring that there is no assault, challenge or denial of individuals identity and experience

Efficient processes in respect for individuals and organisations that are managing many demands and priorities, often in a high-pressure and resource-constrained environment

The Analysis was conducted in two phases between September 2021 and February 2022. The impact of COVID-19 restrictions meant the initial timeframe planned was extended and engagement in Phase one was completed remotely.

Phase one – September to December 2021

Key informant interviews were undertaken remotely with community residents (5); representatives of community organisations, associations, or networks (10); and City of Melbourne staff (6) (details in **Annex 1**)

Focus group activity (in person) with primary students, (6 total – 5 male, 1 female)

Survey (using [Parampara application](#)) distributed in the North and West Melbourne newspaper was accessed by 48 users of which 13 completed

Phase two – January to February 2022

Additional key informant interviews remote and in person (4)

Focus group discussions in-person with international tertiary students (19 total – 8 male, 11 female), older Vietnamese residents (13 total – 1 male, 12 female) young Muslim women (3) and young African women and men was scheduled but due to unavailability of the bicultural worker could not take place.

Initial conversations in Phase one identified certain groups in the community as being less visible, less heard, or having less connection, voice, and agency within the wider community. The groups identified were international students, older Chinese / Vietnamese residents, young Muslim women, African youth (male and female), and younger school aged children. Further engagement through in-depth focus group discussions with these groups took place in Phase two.

A visible group identified by informants as one needing more support were people experiencing homelessness and people in transient housing. People with drug and alcohol dependency were also identified in the initial interviews conducted in Phase one. The Centre in late 2021 commenced a program of engagement and are now conducting activities with residents of Ozanam House that includes people in unsecure housing, many of whom have experienced addiction and psychosocial and mental ill health. As activities have commenced with this group, they did not participate in

specific focus group discussion in Phase two of the Analysis and information about their specific needs and aspirations were not collected by the consultant for the purpose of the CNA report. Several brief updates are provided in this report that detail the ways in which The Centre has engaged with this group in response to the findings and opportunities identified in the Analysis.

Alex Gyles commenced as The Centre's Community Development Coordinator in September 2021. He has contributed to engagement and analysis of findings for the Community Needs Analysis. Contributing to the CNA has helped in his orientation to the community and to meet stakeholders from community agencies and organisations and community members. It has helped him to form ongoing stakeholder and partner relations and has him to commence some engagement program activities (for example engagement with residents from Ozanam House) during the period of the Analysis.

Governance

A project steering group with membership of program staff from North Melbourne Language and Learning (NMLL), The City of Melbourne and representatives from The Centre's staff and Board members formed to provide oversight of the Analysis project. The group guided the original project scope, the selection of the consultant, and met four times during the Analysis. The steering group members provided guidance and feedback on the implementation of the process and the emergent findings and provided feedback and approved the final CNA report.

The North Melbourne Agency Collective (NAC) was engaged during the inception and planning phase and was updated on the progress and findings at follow up meetings. Many of its members also contributed as key informants.

Limitations

The major challenge faced during the Analysis was the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns and COVID safe requirements severely curtailed the number of face-to-face interviews and focus group meetings that were conducted. Interviews in Phase one were done remotely, which meant that more creative and interactive in person group engagement that had been planned did not take place. It is evident that COVID-19 context increased demands for individuals. For some enduring long term and severe lockdowns, added to their already busy lives and limited their ability to participate in the consultations.

Some community residents had experienced the sudden and hard lockdown of the Public Housing Towers (July 2020). Representatives from community organisations working closely with this community noted that for many residents the severe lockdown had been traumatic, and some may also have felt over-consulted about their immediate needs and longer-term recovery programs, which may have contributed to challenges in gaining their participation in consultations for this Analysis.

The impact of the experiences and context of the COVID pandemic has influenced the responses to interview questions and to some extent the discussions in the focus group that took place in early 2022. Understandably the recent experiences of the previous two years strongly influenced

informants' perspectives of strengths and weaknesses and of needs and priorities related to their personal lives, and the community.

Low awareness and knowledge about The Centre (its location, activities etc.) despite its prominent location in Errol Street, contributed to lower levels of engagement. To manage this challenge, initial interviews in Phase one focused on people already connected with The Centre. A "snowball" approach was used with contacts then making introductions to other contacts with less or no connection with The Centre. This approach helped manage the challenge of "cold calling and emailing" and helped widen the informant group.

Bicultural workers from CoHealth helped to arrange and co-facilitate group discussions that were conducted in Phase two. This approach overall worked well. Their relationship and understanding of their community members supported engaging, accessible, and culturally safe practice.

The survey, although it generated interest, had very low completion rate. This may be due to the design, although Parampara, a simple and interactive app was used. It may also have been due to the incongruence of the local North and West Melbourne community newspaper being the main channel for marketing an online survey. It may also be that readership did not have interest or technical capability to complete an online survey. It is noted that an earlier online survey for a different project that was shared through the newspaper also had very low response rate.

The most recent demographic data available for this Analysis is from the 2016 census as the 2021 census data is not yet available. There is no population or demographic data available since the onset of COVID-19. Anecdotally it appears that the population in North Melbourne dropped due to the COVID-19 pandemic due to online study and international and Australian university students moved out of their student accommodation in the suburb. Overall, there was an increase in vacant rental properties at that time. Specific data is not available and as COVID-19 conditions change this is likely to impact on population size and demographics.

The information for this Analysis came from a good and representative number of community organisations and service providers. The number of community individuals were fewer than planned, but conversations did take place with individuals and with small community groups who previously had none or minimal knowledge or engagement with The Centre. The initial positive engagement with these groups has sparked interest and offers for future and potential ongoing connection and collaboration with The Centre.

The Community

Location

North Melbourne (postcode 3051) is an old suburb located two kilometres from Melbourne's central business district (CBD). It was first established as a business area in the 1840s and the first homes were built in the early 1850s. Today it retains a mix of older established housing and newer residential (private and public) apartments, industrial, commercial, and retail areas. The North Melbourne AFL

football club (the Kangaroos) was established in 1869 and adds an additional layer to the identity of the suburb; today the club fields women and men teams in the competition. West Melbourne's (postcode 3003) residential areas abuts North Melbourne and Docklands. It is also an old suburb with industrial origins. More recently it has seen growth in its commercial and residential areas (Figure i.).

Both suburbs have a long bicultural and bilingual history and tradition. Although more recent cultural groups contrast with earlier groups, the experience of cultural and language diversity in the communities is not new.

Residents in both suburbs have easy access (within and in bordering suburbs) to several gardens, parks, and open spaces, including Royal Park, Flagstaff Gardens, Arden Street football ground and numerous smaller gardens and pocket parks and green areas.

Figure i. Map of North and West Melbourne



Population

The combined residential population of North and West Melbourne is 20,005 (North Melbourne 14490, West Melbourne 5515¹). In North Melbourne there has been a steady growth in the number of residents of 43% since 2013. This growth is projected to continue to reach 28,000 in 2036, with further growth projected to continue in the following decades.

Factors contributing to the increase in population in both suburbs includes:

¹ Source ABS Census Data 2016 accessed 27.2.22

https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/SSC21954

- New residential construction, particularly of private apartments
- Increase in accommodation designated for tertiary students
- Increase in the number of international university students

The Arden Precinct is a major infrastructure project built around the Arden Metrolink station. It will be an employment and innovation hub and offer new housing that includes a small component of social housing. It is projected that by 2050 it will be home to 15,000 residents and offer employment to 34,000². Rebuilding is currently underway of social and private housing and a new primary school campus on Molesworth and Abbotsford Street will further contribute to population growth in the area.

Key demographic data (from 2016 census) most relevant for this analysis for each of the suburbs is provided below. Overall, the demographic features of each suburb are similar. Any critical differences are noted in the combined summary provided below.

Key Demographic Features

North and West Melbourne

- **A young population**
 - median age 28
 - about 10% are aged under 14 years
 - average of about 2 children per family
- **Culturally and linguistically diverse**
 - more than half have both parents born outside Australia
 - under 25% have both parents born in Australia
 - less than half of residents speak only English at home
 - Mandarin Chinese is the most common language after English spoken at home
 - languages also spoken – Cantonese, Vietnamese, Korean, Somali, Arabic, Spanish, Italian
- **Employment**
 - professional workers are the largest group represented
 - over half the residents are in full time employment
 - about 10% are not employed in North Melbourne, slightly lower in West Melbourne (8%)
- **Housing**
 - majority of residents live in apartments
 - most rent rather than own / paying a mortgage on their residences

² <https://Vpa.vic.gov.au/project/arden> Accessed 26.2.22

Demographic Data – North Melbourne

Residents - n=14490 - 48.2% male 51.8% female

Age - median 28 years - 10.5% aged 14 years and younger; 7.1% over 65 years

Marriage - 65.3% never married

Families - n=2698 – average family size 1.8 children

Education – 48.3% attending education institution of these 54.6% in tertiary or technical education

Country of birth – 41.7% Australia, 13.5% Peoples Republic of China

Ancestry – 54.4% both parents born overseas, 8.8% one parent born overseas, 24.4% both parents born in Australia, 0.3% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ABTSI)

Language spoken at home – 46.3% speak only English, 43.6% speak other than English (Mandarin 14.6%, Cantonese 3.9% Somali 2.9% Vietnamese 2.4%, Arabic 1.9%)

Employment – 54.7% full time, 29.4% part time, 11.2% unemployed

Occupation – 42% professionals. 12.3% managers, 11.3% community /personal service, 11.2% administration

Housing - 65.5% live in apartment, 45.7% two bedroom, 24.1% one bedroom, 67.8% rented

Demographic Data – West Melbourne

Residents – n= 5515 - 54.2% male 45.8% female

Age - median 28 years - 10.5% aged 14 years and younger; 7.1% over 65 years

Marriage – 66.3% never married

Families – n=1087 – average family size 1.6 children

Education – 42.8% attending education institution of these 45% in tertiary or technical education

Country of birth – 42.3.% Australia, 7.4% Peoples Republic of China

Ancestry – 22.4% both parents born overseas, 27% one parent born overseas, 22.4% both parents born in Australia, 1.2% Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (ABTSI)

Language spoken at home – 45.4% speak only English, 42.8% speak other than English (Mandarin 10%, Korean 4.3% Cantonese 3.5%, Spanish 2%, Italian 1.8%)

Employment – 61.1% full time, 26.5% part time, 8.5% unemployed

Occupation – 39.2% professionals. 5.3% computer IT, 4.6% higher education, 3.7% hospitals

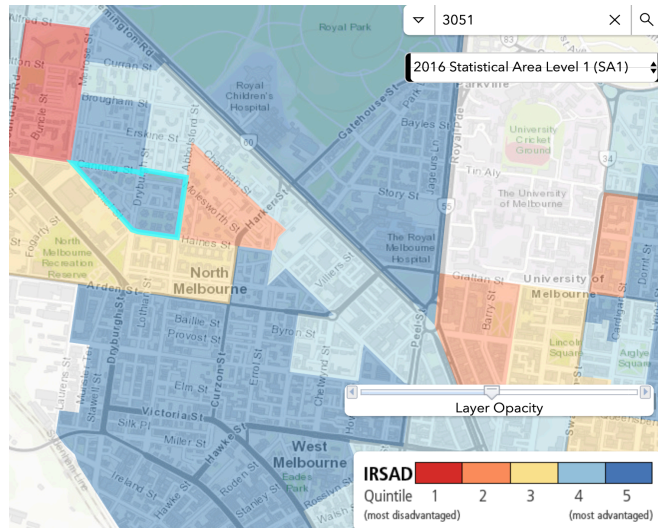
Housing – 71.9% live in apartment, 45.8% two bedroom, 23.6% one bedroom, 62% rented

Social and Economic Advantage and Disadvantage

The five yearly census data can be used to generate indices of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage and provide a measure by location of socio-economic conditions called SEIFA the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas. The SEIFA measure consists of four indexes that capture elements of advantage, disadvantage, wealth/ assets and education and occupation.

Overall North Melbourne has a relatively low SEIFA score that indicates it has pockets of social disadvantage, at a higher level than other areas in the City of Melbourne and when compared to West Melbourne³. The variation of comparative advantage / disadvantage between different parts of the suburb is shown by the colour coded map extracted from ABS website (2016 data) where blue shaded is more advantage and orange / red are comparatively more disadvantaged.

Figure ii. Comparative Advantage / Disadvantage - SEIFA



Community Perspectives

The key informant interview framework (copy in **Annex 2**) explored interviewees' (community residents and representatives of organisations) perspectives about the community of North and West Melbourne. Overall, the most common descriptors (depicted in the word cloud Figure iii) align with the demographic community data that indicates cultural, language, social and economic diversity, and the growing number of younger employed professional people living in the suburbs as well as a smaller number, but significant proportion of people living in public and social housing.

³ <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/small-area-profile-north-melb-2013.pdf>.

Accessed 1.3.22

Outcome Areas

Enquiry was made at three levels – individual, the community, and organisations – for a set of focus outcome areas (refer Scope section of the report). This section of the report presents an analysis of the current situation in relation to each outcome area. This section details the needs, priorities and current situation identified by key informants, as well as their ideas of options and opportunities that The Centre may consider as part of future strategic planning.

Individual

Economic Participation

International students prioritised the area of economic participation. The needs in this area that they identified were wide ranging, for example: *“survival need”* for an income while studying; to have opportunities to gain better understanding and experience of Australian workplaces in sectors and industry related to their coursework; and assistance along the *“pathway”* to gaining employment in their area of study and interest on completion of their studies.

Young Muslim women also identified the need and potential benefit for women from their communities being able to access employment opportunities locally, potentially with community-based organisations and agencies for professional and economic benefit. The need for pathways towards employment was also identified by **young African Australians**.

Access to skills training courses in IT applications, literacy and numeracy was identified as a *“life skill”* for **homeless / men and women in transient housing**, and by people from CALD groups. It also offers potential pathways towards accessing information and preparation for employment. In response to the findings and opportunities identified in the Analysis, The Centre has recommenced providing the 'Computers - Digital Essentials' course to Ozanam House clients. Many clients having completed a term of the course, have enrolled into the following term to further develop their skills.

Opportunities

The informants shared a range of practical ideas on how to progress this outcome area. Some ideas were common between the different informant groups, others were more specific to their specific needs and preferences:

- **Provide training for homeless / transient people** onsite where it is familiar and where there are other support services available (for example Ozanam house or Flagstaff). Clients may take part in courses at The Centre, but first would need to be introduced to the space, and be familiar and at ease in going there. In response to the findings and opportunities identified in the Analysis, The Centre now offers the 'Men's Afternoon Tea' on a fortnightly basis at The Centre on Errol St. This is co-facilitated by The Centre's Community Development Coordinator and the Senior Engagement Worker from Ozanam House. Ozanam House clients making up the majority of attendees. Regular attendees participate while new participants continue to attend and experience The Centre for the first time in a casual setting alongside their peers.

- Suggestions made by **young Muslim women and African Australians** focused on providing opportunities for internships and employment within local community and government offices and agencies. Ideally the initial opportunities could be in a range of areas (bicultural workers, youth workers, community development, administration, and receptionist roles); they may need to be casual and flexible to accommodate other study commitments. Both groups cited positive examples of these opportunities being provided by a local city council and by CoHealth. This has helped to strengthen mutual understanding and trust and the quality of engagement between the community and the agencies / organisations offering employment and has provided clear and sustainable pathways to long term employment.
- **International students** had many ideas on opportunities in this outcome area.
 - They are very keen to learn more about the **Australian workplace culture and standards**, suggesting this could be done through professionals sharing their experiences and discussion on different aspects of workplace behaviour, expectations, and appropriate ways to communicate and interact with peers and managers in the workplace and socially.
 - **Facilitate networking opportunities** between professionals, business owners with students who have relevant skills sets and interests. This may help to create potential links for volunteering, internships, and employment opportunities.
 - **Job search preparation**, drawing on skills and experience of employers and professionals to give guidance on different aspects including CV preparation, application, and interview process.

Health and Wellbeing

The issue of **loneliness and isolation** was shared by several **international students**. While this has been exacerbated during the lockdowns for all residents, the experience was acutely felt by many students who were studying remotely during COVID, and living in inner city apartment blocks, meaning *“you just don’t bump into your neighbours”*. They spoke about missing the sense of feeling welcome and known in their neighbourhood, for example being greeted and known by name. They expressed how hard it was to make real friendships in Australia as an international student. They also spoke about their interest in participating in sports and fitness, and the challenge of finding teams to join, citing a barrier being the cost for entrance and membership fees.

Young Muslim women shared the challenge of being able to find culturally safe and accessible places where women and kids could exercise and have fun locally in the community. They spoke about the benefits physically, mentally, and socially of swimming, playing team sports (basketball, and soccer) and going to the gym. Such opportunities are available but only for limited hours and outside the immediate suburb. *“[swimming] – is a real family event and is a social event that is good for both physical and mental health”*. They also spoke about the lack of local spaces where they can easily go to socialise and relax to *“remove our headscarves and be ourselves”*. The barriers they raised to doing this were mainly to do with ease of booking these spaces due to the process, and the lack of availability of places to go after working hours.

Opportunities

The young Muslim women are seeking places where, as Muslim women they can go and share openly, talk and do activities with others who share their values, culture, and traditions. They are keen to see if they can use The Centre or some other space nearby in North Melbourne for such informal social gatherings and for activities for example trivia nights, a book club, and possibly invite speakers to share information and facilitate discussions on health and social issues. Their idea is that they be given access to a space that they can use as their own. They will take responsibility to plan and coordinate the events and activities with their community.

The **international students** suggested The Centre could help them to organise social events (day hikes, walking tours around the city or neighbourhood, camping, visits outside Melbourne), volunteering and other community events that they can be part of and through them build friendships with other students as well as connect with others in their community. They spoke about preferring a program of activities rather than one off events as a better way to build friendships.

Primary school children were positive about the places locally in their community that they could go to play basketball and do gymnastics, but as there is no place for skateboarding in their community, instead they must go to Kensington. The children spoke about the smoking in the community and thought that there should be more designated no smoking areas. They also raised concern about the number of people affected by drug and alcohol and sometimes the violence and shouting associated with this that they saw close to where they live and play.

Vietnamese older people spoke about their interest in exercise, socialising, music, cooking, and dance and the mental and social wellbeing benefits of these group activities. They are keen to have a place locally, potentially at The Centre to do these activities together. They also are keen to help young Vietnamese mothers to socialise and relax, suggesting The Centre may find a place where the mothers can meet while their children are at playgroup.

Access to Learning

The Centre is a learn local centre and already offers a range of pre-accredited training, and informal skills and recreational learning opportunities and a homework club. Other local community organisations provide a variety of other learning opportunities. Many of the community members we spoke with are keen to learn new skills. The motivation to participate in learning opportunities ranges from potential benefits for employment, and for reasons of personal health and wellbeing. Some informants are keen to share the skills and experiences that they have, citing a wide range of skills and expertise that they would be interested to share.

Informants identified a few barriers to accessing learning (formal and informal for fun) - a lack of knowledge about The Centre and what it offers, the location of the course of activity and the need for it to take place in an accessible and culturally safe place, and an additional barrier for some is the cost of the course fees.

Opportunities

Many of the community members did express an interest and willingness to share their skills and experience with others. There are many motivated people who want to share their wide range of interests and expertise in areas including dancing, languages, cooking, art, music, and exercise.

There is a very high level of interest to participate in learning activities. Informants expressed a wide and diverse range of interest - conversational language classes; learning more about “*Australian slang*”; cultural exchange and learning opportunities; engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culture, and history; Australian politics; self-defence are just some of the areas of interest that were identified.

From these initial conversations, there appears to be an excellent opportunity for The Centre to explore the options in more detail with the different community groups and individuals to determine the genuine level of interest, and to identify the best role that the Centre can take (for example providing space, resources and promoting the activities) to support more learning activities.

Local Connection to Place and People

The lack of connection and isolation that **international students** often feel with others in the community has already been identified. As well as isolation experienced during COVID, the students expressed that the limited timeframe of their stay in Australia, (perhaps just for the duration of their studies) might mean that long term residents in the community are less committed to investing time in forming friendships. Another contributing factor is many students only live short-term in rental properties and move frequently, often between different suburbs.

Language is another barrier that many informants raised. Most of the **older Vietnamese and Chinese residents** do not speak English and because of the language barrier, they lack confidence to join other groups or activities with people from outside their own language group. The **young Muslim women** spoke about language being an issue for older women in their community (“*the aunties*”). They spoke also about the importance of cultural safety and the benefits of connecting with others who hold similar values, beliefs and who “*look like you*”. They acknowledge that this is less of an issue for younger women in their community (for example their younger sisters or cousins) who have had greater exposure to different cultural groups and have confidence about their identities of being African and Muslim and an Australian. They attributed this to social media that provides a strong and positive influence that has helped broaden the perspectives of these younger women in their community and supported them to develop a greater sense of self-identity and empowerment – “*[they are better able] --- to juggle culture*”.

A disconnect between different groups who live in North and West Melbourne was raised in the initial key informant interviews. The “diversity” within the community has already been described and is evident from the socio-economic indicator data. This is validated by findings from informant interviews. People interviewed expressed that they are more connected to certain places and people in the community. The divide between those in the south and the north (“*uphill and downhill*”) parts of the community, and that people don’t tend to move between the areas was frequently raised by informants. An example was shared by Ozanam House staff, that their residents are less comfortable

and at not generally at ease on Errol Street and prefer to shop elsewhere in the north of the suburb. Some residents in the south of the suburb spoke about not knowing and rarely going to areas outside their immediate location. Many of the CALD community members will go to neighbouring suburbs for services and for social and cultural activities (for example Flemington, Kensington, Moonee Valley).

Overall, though North and West Melbourne is described as friendly community, and the diversity of its residents is seen as a strength. Unsurprisingly there is a strong tendency for people to connect with certain people and in certain places where they feel safe and most at ease. This is discussed further in relation to the outcome on community and social cohesion.

Opportunities

The potential to strengthen connection between people with place have been shared in the earlier outcome areas. The critical learning made, based on what was shared by nearly all informants, is there is a need for a **safe and accessible place** where people can meet, socialise and do activities. The preference is to meet with others from their own community group and to do activities (formal, informal, or just socialise and have fun) that they choose. They also often prefer to arrange and facilitate the activities themselves, rather seeing the role of The Centre being to provide access to the space, support arrangements and logistics, and be able to provide refreshments/ food for participants.

The starting point is for people from the same community group to meet together. Over time, as trust and relationships are formed and The Centre becomes known as a familiar and safe place, there is potential to broaden the types of engagement, and this may involve connecting with other community members from outside the immediate community group.

The key enabler to establish an initial connection and to help foster the relationship between the community group and The Centre is a bicultural worker, volunteer or another community member who is known and trusted by the group's members and shares their culture and language.

The **young Muslim women** suggested that the local community newspaper, [The North and West Melbourne news](#) provides a great opportunity for strengthening connection between people and with their place. The newspaper already has community guest writers. The young women suggested that publishing stories about their community members, for example achievements of Muslim kids at school, would help strengthen links and connections between their community and the wider community. Positive, personal stories may help raise community members' awareness and reduce any tendency for preconceived views or perspectives that may exist by both members of the Muslim community and the wider non-Muslim community members. It will also help those within their immediate cultural and religious community, particularly older people, to feel more connected and part of the place where they live.

Many of the informants spoke about the value of community festivals focused around different cultures, music, arts, food, seeing them as a way to foster understanding and create a sense of unity between different parts of the community. This is discussed more under social cohesion. At an individual / smaller group level socialising and sharing food together was commonly given as a fun and positive way to connect people and build relationships. Other ideas shared were community located activities that help create connection between people and with place, for example a community vegetable garden, street art (drawings street murals, pavement chalk art), and community cultural and heritage walks that bring to light the diversity of the people and the place.

Community

Community Empowerment

Informants consistently referred to certain groups within the community that are **empowered**, largely determined in terms of visibility, being engaged in advocacy and action, and overall having access to resources, and greater voice and agency, compared to others. Groups or associations representing young Africans (men more than women) and particularly those of Somali, and Eritrean heritage were consistently identified as more prominent and more empowered groups of the North Melbourne Community.

Asian community members tend to be less visible and less vocal. As part of this analysis, consultation with an organisation representing older Chinese residents, and through the support of a bicultural worker from the Vietnamese community, a very useful discussion with Vietnamese residents was successfully conducted. As a result, positive connections have been made by The Centre with these less visible groups in the community and future engagement is expected to take place.

The factors contributing to **empowerment** of visible community groups includes strong and often charismatic leaders who have a high profile and have formed effective alliances and partnerships with other larger community- based organisations. Over time the partnerships have helped raise the profile and build the capacity of the culturally based organisations, helping them to demonstrate effectiveness and to deliver good results (often in high profile programs) for both their community and in line with expectations of partner organisations and funders. Examples shared by informants are strong awareness and advocacy and programs that have taken place on issues related to knife crime, crime prevention, and on racial profiling, particularly of African male youth, by police.

The challenges of understanding the representation and dynamics of **leaders** of different cultural groups, and the views and interests that they represent was raised by community organisation staff. They noted that leaders are often self-appointed and represent factions rather than wider community interests. Family and internal politics and historical relationships often influence the way in which decisions are reached, and it is not uncommon for dissenting voices to be silenced. For those outside the group and for those working in the community organisations, there are real *“--- challenges in navigating and working through the different layers, voices and internal relationships”*.

Anecdotally, we heard that many of the **leaders** of significant community groups live outside the North and West Melbourne community, but they do retain ties and strong influence and commitment to their community members who live locally and appear to still have a genuine local connection with their community. This was evident in the group of young Muslim women who were consulted. All had at some time lived in or around North Melbourne but had moved away with their families as children or young adults. They retain strong connections through the mosque in North Melbourne, and their family and friends who still live locally. The women also are working locally as bicultural and community health workers.

The engagement of **bicultural workers** who are connected to their community and language group and are known and trusted is an essential component of effective community engagement. *“Sharing information by word of mouth works best within our community” (Bicultural worker)*. While the workers have their own links and relationships, taking the role of interlocutor between community members and community organisations supports culturally safe engagement and helps in navigating the complexity and layers present in different culturally based community groups. Further, having a personal connection with community enables opportunities that help to give voice and agency to community members who may not be well represented by the established leadership and traditional community dynamics; for example, women and girls, and those who have limited English language and are less connected with the wider community. As trusted community members the bicultural workers are often best placed to share information, advice, and guidance, and can convey ideas and preferences of the less heard community members. *“It helps to have an ally ---- often engagement with [our] community is well intentioned, but it is unlikely to work unless there is a connection with someone from our community --- need to work within our religious and cultural beliefs and values” (Bicultural worker)*.

Informants from most community organisations spoke about their commitment to work closely in partnership with community in the design and delivery of programs and projects in line with **codesign** principles. However, we heard from both the organisations and the community members, that it was rare that genuine codesign processes were conducted. *“Generally, there is a lack of community representatives in planning, design and delivery of projects” (Community leader)*. The reasons given include limited timeframes to design and develop a project; lack of resources to engage properly in codesign processes (for example employ bicultural workers and dedicate program staff time); and the community organisation often is pursuing funding tied to an issue which is not relevant or important for community or the funding is for a one off, short-term project which is unlikely to be effective given its timeframe.

Community members shared experiences of participating in consultations, but too often seeing no action followed and no discernible benefits for their community. They also spoke about the limited relevance and effectiveness of the resources allocated through many of the community projects. The weaknesses were not however generally recognised by the funder, as they rarely engaged directly with community to hear their views and experiences, rather relying only on the results reported to them by the community organisation.

Opportunities

The opportunities suggested for community organisations to enhance support and enable greater community empowerment are:

- Consistently work with **bicultural workers** and other culturally and language located volunteers and community workers, either by employing them on their own teams or through collaboration with other organisations and community groups
- Seek to develop **long term enduring relationships** that supports the formation of strong and mutually respectful partnerships that will enable codesign, codelivery of programs and shared accountability for outcomes with community

- **Recruit community representatives** in community organisations and services providers as staff, volunteers and in governance roles, to help achieve a more representative community perspective and enhance the voice and agency of the groups that the organisation aims to work with and assist
- **Communicate** (share information and hear views) with those less visible and with less voice and agency by using means that work most effectively within the community, for example word of mouth, social media, in the community group's language, and through trusted community sources and interlocutors

Social Cohesion

The cultural, socio and economic diversity within North and West Melbourne has already been described. Many informants positively highlighted the diversity within their community, viewing it as an asset and strength in what was overall described as a friendly and safe community and one where cultural, religious and language diversity is welcomed and celebrated. However, the **students in the homework club** did speak about their concern and sometimes feeling unsure and unsafe around people in their community with mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependency and homeless people.

Practical examples were shared of real concern and commitment to help and support individuals and groups within the community, particularly during the COVID-19 lockdowns. This was particularly strong in the examples shared about the resilience and unity of residents in the Public Housing who endured the long and hard enforced lockdown often in crowded and small apartments. However, the experience of the Public Housing amplified the lack of cohesion within the community. As one community leader who knows the Towers well said about the sudden and hard lockdown of the Towers “--- it made the public housing visible, but the residents were treated as third class citizens”.

Opportunities

Informants identified a range of opportunities that focus particularly on the social cohesion dimensions of acceptance and of belonging⁴. The ideas shared include:

- Festivals and events (small and larger scale) where community groups come together to showcase and share their culture through music, dance, theatre, and food
- Cultural exchange and connection more specifically between groups sharing meals, language classes
- Sharing insights, news and information and giving voice to the experiences and achievements of different community groups through the newspaper will raise awareness and understanding in the community, and help to foster a sense of belonging
- Creating informal “organic” ways whereby different community groups connect through shared spaces and co-locating their meetings and activities in ways that naturally provide positive opportunities for interaction and engagement

⁴ <https://scanlonfoundation.org.au/mapping-social-cohesion/> accessed March 1st 2022

- Representation of the community in community organisations staff, governance and volunteers will foster greater understanding and belonging and help to create stronger voice and agency.

Organisations

Capacity of Community Organisations

Informants, both community members and from community organisations and council, consistently noted that there is an ample range and enough **services** available for the community in the North and West Melbourne area. People can access the services they need locally, although many choose to access services outside, most in bordering suburbs of Flemington, Kensington, and Carlton.

While there is no shortage of services locally, the challenge identified, mainly by community members and some organisations, is the lack of coordination between services. Informants suggested this led to duplication of some services and heightened demand on a relatively select few community leaders and associations to partner in the design and delivery of programs.

Informants also spoke about the challenge of community finding out where services are, and what they do. *“There are plenty of services, but they are not connected or networked --- and there is no system, so the people do not know about the services and the services are not reaching the people who need them.” (Community group leader)*. The lack of visibility of services may have been amplified due to COVID-19 as many services and programs operated remotely or were paused due to restrictions and lockdowns.

The North Melbourne Agency Collective (NAC) was cited by many staff from community organisations and the Melbourne City Council as fulfilling an important **coordination and communication** role. The importance of its convening and communication functions have been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic response. However, many informants suggested that more consistent coordination between community services providers, ideally to support collaboration around advocacy initiatives and programs and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services in the community was needed. Although cited as a priority, the challenge about the practicalities of achieving coordination in practice and the need to have dedicated resources to do this was often raised.

Community organisations’ staff spoke about the challenges of limited **funding** opportunities. This tends to drive a competitive rather than collaborative approach between agencies when preparing funding and grant applications, and often agencies are reaching out to collaborate with the same more visible community groups and leaders. As discussed earlier, this limits the extent to which community is represented in the projects, and that the resources and capacity accessed contributes to relevant and good outcomes.

There was little awareness about **The Centre** or knowledge about its purpose and activities. Community organisations that have engaged with The Centre understood about its work, but even then, their knowledge was limited to a specific engagement or activity where there had been

collaboration. Most community members had not previously engaged with The Centre and were not aware about it at all.

Paving the Way Forward is an initiative launched by the Victorian State Government through the Department of Health and Human Services. In North Melbourne, it is being delivered in partnership between North Melbourne Language and Learning, Drummond Street Services and Mission Australia. It came about out of the July 2020 sudden and extreme lockdown of the Public Housing due to COVID-19. Its purpose is to facilitate greater opportunities for public housing residents in North Melbourne and Flemington.

In the initial 12-month period the program is piloting new ways of working with residents and community groups, local government, and service providers in the public housing communities. The aim is to involve community to solve local problems and build on its strengths and assets. The program's model has the potential to positively influence ways of engaging and working with community and in coordination and partnership between community organisation, associations and with the State and Local governments.

Opportunities

- Community organisations strengthen coordination and cooperation by identifying an issue or key issues important to the community that they can convene around for advocacy and or program development
- Community organisations explore ways to strengthen their coordination and communication about their work, activities and the community groups and clients they engage with
- The Centre continues to seek ways to raise its profile within the community by being more visible, and by promoting and communicating its activities through different channels and media that will reach a wider group in the community
- The Centre considers taking on the role of a neighbourhood information centre that helps community members find the services and programs they are seeking
- Community representation (as staff, volunteers and in governance) will help strengthen capacity of organisations through improved understanding and relationships with the people they seek to work with.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions from the Analysis that was completed for each of the three levels - individual, community, and organisation are presented in this section of the report with **recommendations**, that address the purpose of the Analysis, *to inform the development of new and creative ways for The Centre to engage with diverse communities in the suburbs of North and West Melbourne and to better meet their identified priorities and needs*⁵.

The **recommendations** focus on strategic and operational actions that The Centre may consider taking. The details of opportunities, including options for future action by The Centre that were identified from the interviews and consultations with key informants have already been shared, and are not repeated in this section of the report.

Individuals

A diversity of people who live in and around the areas of North and West Melbourne expressed interest in engaging with The Centre. All groups who participated in the discussions facilitated for this analysis – international students, older Vietnamese residents, young Muslim women – had no prior knowledge about The Centre. Following the discussions, all are keen to continue engagement with The Centre and to explore options of how The Centre may support them to conduct activities that are of interest for their group (details shared in the previous section of the report).

The members of each group shared many aspirations and ideas. Many members of the group have a wide range of skills that they can share informally within their own group and more widely with others. All showed strong willingness to contribute their skills, time and effort to mobilise their members, and help to arrange and facilitate activities.

The main support that The Centre is requested to provide is to provide a place where the groups can regularly meet to socialise and for their activities. This may be at The Centre on Errol Street, or it may be that a larger and more suitable space nearby will need to be found.

The older Vietnamese and young Muslim women are strongly connected with their cultural and language group. They are best placed to convene members and organise the events and activities through designated leaders within the groups who are known and trusted and using communication channels that are accessible and familiar to each community group. For these groups, The Centre is very much an enabler for the activities and meetings by providing access to a space where the groups can meet to do their own activities.

The group of international students are keen to connect more with each other and more widely with the local community. This group will need more help from The Centre to make the connections with others and to arrange and facilitate social and networking events and activities.

⁵ Terms of Reference, Annex 1

Recommendations

- i. **Convene follow up meetings** with representatives of the three groups and explore in more detail options and practical next steps to progress the engagement between The Centre and these groups. Ideally these meetings should take place quite quickly to build on the initial interest and enthusiasm and to dispel concerns that was expressed during the consultations that groups are often consulted by community organisations, but action rarely follows.
- ii. **Continue engagement with members of the CALD community** in culturally safe and accessible ways through employment of bicultural workers, working with and through community members and existing channels of communication and providing interpreters and translation of information.
- iii. **Invest in building relationships and mutual trust** between The Centre and community members by dedicating staff time and allocate specific resources including a budget to cover costs for social events, meals etc. that are important enablers that support effective community engagement.

Community

Over the next 30 years the population of North and West Melbourne is projected to continue to grow. This is mainly due to the large-scale Arden precinct development and continued construction of apartments in the suburb.

The Arden development will undoubtedly change the community profile. It is likely that young professionals are more likely to move into the community. However, diversity in terms of economic, social, cultural and language will continue to be a feature of the North and West Melbourne community. A significant although smaller proportion of the community will continue to live in public and social housing, and assuming international students return to Australia post COVID, this group will also contribute to the community's cultural and language diversity.

The cultural and language diversity in the North and West Melbourne community is overall viewed positively as an asset and strength. However, elements (described by some informants "*as being beneath the surface*") of division within the community exist, that is largely created by economic disparity and of social situations. The "*gentrifying*" of certain areas may in the future amplify these disparities and increase the level of economic and social division within the community.

Recommendations

- i. **Continue to reach out to different groups within the community** through applying culturally nuanced approaches; working with community interlocutors (bicultural workers, community volunteers and leaders); and with other community organisations and agencies that have established connections and relationships.
- ii. **Keep up to date and understand the changing community demographics** and use this information guide the strategic focus and planning of The Centre. It will be particularly important to update the demographic data in this analysis when the most recent census data (2021) is available, and to track data of international students and occupancy rates of private rental property post COVID to understand the impact of COVID on the population size and composition.
- iii. **Continue to positively promote the value and benefit of rich cultural and language diversity within the community**, by arranging small scale exchanges between different community groups, and larger community events and festivals that showcase and share the different assets and aspects of culture and facilitates inclusion and unity within community.

Organisations

There is a clear consensus between informants that North and West Melbourne has a sufficient number and good range of community organisations and services. The limiting factors that impact on their effectiveness is the poor coordination and communication between services and organisations, and lack of clear and accessible information available about types of services that are available locally. This creates challenges for community in navigating the system and knowing where to go to obtain the services that they need.

Overall, the community members expressed concern about the lack of community engagement in the design and delivery of programs. The feeling is that organisations tend to be “*donor driven more than community driven*” which influences focus of programs and how they are designed and implemented. Although “*community consultation*” (even risks of over consultation) generally takes place, however due to the way consultation is conducted, for example limited time available, who in community is consulted, and the parameters determined by the donor (e.g. the focus of the activities, timeframe, and budget) the relevance and outcomes achieved for community are often diminished.

Organisations are aware of many of these concerns that were raised by community members. Most organisations are trying to work in a more genuine collaborative way with community. The reality is that they are operating in a highly competitive funding space, with tight budgets and often short design and delivery timeframes. Unless there is core / untied program funding, and suitably experienced staff, it is very hard for organisations to dedicate time for effective and genuine collaborative engagement and codesign and delivery with communities.

The Centre overall is not well known by the community of North and West Melbourne beyond those who currently or in the past have participated in its programs. Other community organisations in North and West Melbourne also have inconsistent and overall limited knowledge of The Centre and its activities.

Recommendations

- i. **Increase representation of the community of North and West Melbourne**
 - Seek to recruit CALD staff from or with lived experience in the local community ideally in community engagement or project officer roles, or as bicultural workers
 - Broaden the representation of community on the Board membership, with consideration of cultural and linguistic background, life experiences and age that is representative of the current community demographics
 - Consider establishing a community development governance group, that is representative of community and is culturally and linguistically diverse to inform the community development program. This group could also make recommendations to the board in relation to broader organisational change.
 - Seek to expand the number and diversity of volunteers engaged from different groups within the local community

- ii. **Dedicate resources** (staff and budget) to support ongoing meaningful community engagement, recognising it is an ongoing process that requires investment of time and some dedicated resources to genuinely implement cooperatively with community through codesign and codelivery process.
- iii. **Provide accessible spaces either at The Centre** or elsewhere if a larger or more suitable space is needed that community groups can use for their own activities and events.
- iv. **Increase awareness** about The Centre by being more visible and connected with the community through building on the positive steps that have been taken in reaching outside the office and by continuing to form links and engage more broadly with community members, groups and organisations.
- v. **Continue to actively connect and coordinate with other community organisations and agencies** to share information and seek areas for collaboration, and with other community stakeholders explore opportunities to improve wider coordination and communication between organisations and with the community.