



AURORA MULTICULTURAL
ADVISORY HUB INC

AP-005 - SMART LIVING: “WHAT NO ONE TOLD US”

Pilot Program Report — Season 1

Listening to lived experience. Co-designing practical solutions. Building stronger multicultural communities.

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SMART LIVING: “WHAT NO ONE TOLD US”

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24 August 2025

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1. About This Report

This report documents Aurora Multicultural Advisory Hub Inc.'s inaugural community pilot program, **Smart Living: "What No One Told Us"**, delivered on 24 August 2025 at The Harmony Centre in Reservoir, Victoria.

The pilot was designed as a community-led proof of concept.

It brought together people from multicultural backgrounds, community representatives, professionals, service providers and government stakeholders to discuss the practical challenges experienced by migrants, refugees, students and families when navigating life, services and opportunities in Australia.

The report presents the program's purpose, design, key themes, lessons and implications for future community development initiatives.



2. Executive Summary

Settlement is not a single event.

It is an ongoing process that involves navigating unfamiliar services, institutions, cultural expectations, employment systems, education pathways and community networks.

Many people arrive in Australia with skills, experience, ambition and resilience. However, they are not always provided with the practical information, connections or culturally responsive support required to participate fully in their new communities.

Smart Living: “What No One Told Us” was created to listen directly to these experiences.

The program provided a structured space for participants to:

- Share lived experience.
- Identify recurring barriers.
- Discuss gaps in existing support systems.
- Connect with community members and service providers.
- Develop practical ideas for future action.
- Contribute to the design of Aurora’s emerging program model.

Five major barriers consistently shaped the discussion:

1. Difficulty navigating services.
2. Language and communication barriers.
3. Limited recognition of overseas qualifications and experience.
4. Inconsistent cultural safety and understanding.
5. Social isolation and limited community connection.

The pilot confirmed that many settlement challenges are interconnected. They cannot be addressed effectively through isolated services or short-term interventions.

Participants highlighted the need for coordinated, practical and community-informed approaches that strengthen individual capability, organisational responsiveness and cross-sector collaboration.

The pilot became an important foundation for Aurora’s broader community capability approach.

3. About Aurora

Aurora Multicultural Advisory Hub Inc. is a registered Australian charity working to strengthen multicultural communities through leadership, partnerships, capability building and evidence-informed community development.

Aurora works with communities, government, education providers, businesses, service organisations and other partners to develop practical solutions that improve participation, wellbeing and long-term social and economic outcomes.

Our approach is based on a simple principle:

Sustainable community development requires more than access to services. It requires people, organisations and systems to develop the capability to create lasting change.



4. Why the Program Was Created

People entering a new country are often expected to understand complex systems immediately.

They may be required to navigate:

- Housing.
- Employment.
- Education.
- Health services.
- Government programs.
- Transport.
- Banking.
- Legal obligations.
- Community services.
- Professional accreditation.
- Social and cultural expectations.

Information may exist, but it is often fragmented across multiple organisations and government systems.

Some people do not know where to begin.

Others receive information only after experiencing a crisis, losing an opportunity or spending significant time attempting to navigate the system independently.

The title **“What No One Told Us”** reflects this gap.

It recognises that many important aspects of settlement, participation and daily life are learned informally, through trial and error, rather than through accessible and coordinated support.

Aurora created the pilot to bring these experiences into the open and use them to inform practical solutions.

5. Program Purpose

The purpose of the pilot was to:

- Listen to the lived experience of multicultural communities.
- Identify barriers affecting settlement and participation.
- understand where existing systems are difficult to navigate.
- Create stronger connections between communities and service providers.
- Test a community-led engagement model.
- Generate practical ideas for future programs.
- Establish an evidence base for Aurora’s community capability work.



The program was not designed as a one-off information session.

It was designed as an initial step in an ongoing process of listening, co-design, capability building and partnership development.

6. Program Design

The pilot combined community dialogue, shared learning and collaborative problem-solving.

Program Approach

Listen

- Participants were encouraged to speak openly about their experiences, including what had helped them and what had made settlement or participation more difficult.

Connect

- The program brought together people with different experiences, roles and perspectives.

Explore

- Participants examined recurring challenges and considered how those challenges were connected.

Co-design

- Community members and stakeholders discussed practical responses that could be developed collaboratively.

Learn

- Aurora captured the themes, lessons and implications to guide future programs and partnerships.





7. Who Participated

The pilot brought together people with varied experiences and perspectives, including:

- Migrants.
- Refugees.
- International students.
- Families.
- Young people.
- Professionals.
- Community representatives.
- Service providers.
- Government representatives.
- Volunteers.
- Community leaders.

This diversity strengthened the discussion.

Participants were able to compare individual experiences, identify common patterns and consider how communities, organisations and institutions could respond more effectively.

8. What We Heard

The discussions demonstrated that settlement barriers are rarely experienced in isolation.

A person struggling to have overseas qualifications recognised may also experience unemployment, financial pressure, reduced confidence and social isolation.

A person facing language barriers may also have difficulty accessing health services, understanding legal obligations or supporting children through education.

The pilot highlighted the need to understand the whole person and the broader system surrounding them.

9. Key Themes

9.1 Service Navigation

Participants described difficulty understanding where to find reliable information and which organisation was responsible for providing support.

Common challenges included:

- Services spread across multiple organisations.
- Different eligibility requirements.
- Complex application processes.
- Unclear referral pathways.
- Limited awareness of available support.



- Repetition of personal information across different services.
- Difficulty determining which source of information was trustworthy.

The issue was not always the absence of services.

In many cases, the main problem was the absence of a clear and accessible pathway between the person and the service.

Community Insight

Access is not meaningful when people cannot understand, locate or navigate the service.

9.2 Language and Communication Barriers

Language affected more than basic communication.

It influenced people's ability to:

- Understand official information.
- Complete forms.
- Communicate with service providers.
- Participate in employment.
- Advocate for themselves.
- Understand rights and responsibilities.
- Build confidence in unfamiliar settings.

Participants also highlighted that technically translated information may still be difficult to understand where it is not culturally relevant or written in accessible language.

Community Insight

Effective communication requires language access, cultural understanding and practical explanation.

9.3 Recognition of Overseas Qualifications and Experience

Participants discussed the frustration of arriving with qualifications, professional experience and established careers that were not readily recognised.

Challenges included:

- Complex accreditation requirements.
- Costly recognition processes.
- Limited information about professional pathways.
- Employer preference for local experience.
- Difficulty obtaining relevant references.
- Underemployment.
- Loss of professional identity and confidence.

These barriers can result in highly capable people being excluded from work that reflects their skills and experience.



Community Insight

Communities do not lack capability. The system does not always recognise or activate the capability they already possess.

9.4 Cultural Safety

Participants highlighted the importance of services that understand and respect cultural background, communication styles and lived experience.

Cultural safety involves more than celebrating diversity.

It requires organisations and professionals to consider:

- Power imbalances.
- Assumptions and unconscious bias.
- Different understandings of family and community.
- Experiences of migration, displacement and trauma.
- Religious and cultural practices.
- Trust in institutions.
- Communication preferences.

Participants valued services that listened carefully, avoided judgement and treated cultural identity as a strength rather than a barrier.

Community Insight

People participate more confidently when they feel respected, understood and safe.

9.5 Social Isolation and Community Connection

Social isolation emerged as a significant issue affecting wellbeing and participation.

Participants described challenges such as:

- Separation from family and established support networks.
- Difficulty forming new friendships.
- Limited knowledge of local activities.
- Work and study pressures.
- Transport barriers.
- Lack of culturally familiar spaces.
- Reduced confidence in social settings.

Community connection was viewed as an essential part of successful settlement.

It creates access to information, emotional support, mentoring, employment networks and a sense of belonging.



Community Insight

Connection is not an optional social benefit. It is a foundation for wellbeing, participation and opportunity.

10. Community Capability Insights

The pilot demonstrated that stronger settlement and participation outcomes depend on capability at several levels.

Strong People

Individuals need access to:

- Knowledge.
- Confidence.
- Networks.
- Practical skills.
- Leadership opportunities.
- Education and employment pathways.

Strong Organisations

Community organisations and service providers need:

- Effective governance.
- Cultural capability.
- Sustainable funding.
- Skilled staff and volunteers.
- Strong referral systems.
- Evidence and evaluation capability.

Strong Partnerships

Government, community organisations, education providers and businesses need to:

- Share information.
- Coordinate services.
- Reduce duplication.
- Develop clear referral pathways.
- Co-design solutions.
- Invest in long-term relationships.

Strong Systems

Systems should be:

- Accessible.
- Coordinated.



- Culturally responsive.
- Easy to navigate.
- Informed by lived experience.
- Focused on prevention as well as crisis response.

11. Early Outcomes

The pilot generated several important early outcomes.

Community Voice Was Elevated

Participants were given a structured opportunity to describe their experiences and identify priorities in their own words.

Common Barriers Were Identified

The program revealed recurring challenges across different backgrounds and settlement experiences.

Connections Were Strengthened

The event created opportunities for participants, community representatives and service providers to connect and exchange information.

Future Program Priorities Were Clarified

The discussion informed Aurora's emerging focus on:

- Service navigation.
- Education and employment pathways.
- Wellbeing.
- Leadership.
- Community participation.
- Organisational capability.

Aurora's Delivery Model Was Tested

The pilot demonstrated the value of combining lived experience, facilitated discussion, partnership and co-design within one community engagement model.

12. Lessons from the Pilot

Listening Must Come Before Program Design

- ❖ Programs are more relevant when communities help define the problem and shape the response.

Information Alone Is Not Enough

- ❖ People may receive information but still lack the confidence, support or connections required to act on it.



Settlement Challenges Are Interconnected

- ❖ Employment, education, wellbeing, language and social participation should not be treated as entirely separate issues.

Trusted Relationships Matter

- ❖ Communities are more likely to engage where relationships are consistent, respectful and culturally responsive.

Capability Building Creates Longer-Term Value

- ❖ Programs should strengthen people's ability to navigate systems, make decisions and support others.

Partnerships Must Be Practical

- ❖ Collaboration should produce clear pathways, shared responsibilities and measurable benefits for communities.

13. Recommendations

The pilot identified the following priorities for future action.

1. Improve Service Navigation

Develop accessible pathways that help people identify appropriate services, understand eligibility and move between providers more easily.

2. Expand Community-Based Information

Provide practical information through trusted community networks, accessible language and culturally relevant formats.

3. Strengthen Employment and Qualification Pathways

Support participants to understand accreditation requirements, build local networks and access employment aligned with their capability.

4. Build Cultural Capability Across Services

Support organisations to improve cultural safety, communication and community engagement.

5. Invest in Community Connection

Create regular opportunities for social participation, mentoring, volunteering and leadership.

6. Strengthen Community Organisations

Support grassroots and multicultural organisations to improve governance, funding, partnerships and service capability.



7. Embed Lived Experience in Program Design

Ensure community members remain active contributors to planning, delivery and evaluation.

8. Measure Long-Term Outcomes

Track changes in participation, confidence, employment, leadership, wellbeing and organisational capability.

14. From Pilot to Future Programs

The pilot established a foundation for Aurora's future community development work.

Aurora will use the lessons from **Smart Living: "What No One Told Us"** to inform programs that:

- Strengthen community leadership.
- Improve service navigation.
- Support education and employment pathways.
- Promote wellbeing and inclusion.
- Build organisational capability.
- Connect communities with government and service systems.
- Develop practical partnerships.
- Support early intervention and prevention.

The next phase will move beyond identifying barriers towards testing and scaling practical responses.

Aurora's Community Response Model





15. Acknowledgements

Aurora Multicultural Advisory Hub Inc. acknowledges everyone who contributed to the pilot program.

We thank:

- Community participants who shared their experiences.
- Volunteers who supported the event.
- Service providers and professionals who contributed their knowledge.
- Government and community representatives who participated in the discussion.
- The Harmony Centre for supporting the program.
- Aurora's Board, Executive Leadership Team and supporters.

The honesty, experience and ideas shared through the pilot have helped shape Aurora's future direction.

Closing Statement

Smart Living: "What No One Told Us" demonstrated the importance of listening directly to multicultural communities.

The pilot confirmed that people do not simply need more services.

They need clear pathways, meaningful relationships, recognition of their capability and opportunities to participate in shaping the systems that affect their lives.

Aurora will continue working with communities and partners to transform these insights into practical, sustainable action.

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