



MEDIA RELEASE: SETTLEMENT SECTOR REFORM IN THE 2020-21 BUDGET

Wednesday, 7 October 2020

The Settlement Council of Australia today welcomed several positive reforms announced in the budget including extending programs for migrant and refugee youth, expanding the accessibility of the Adult Migrant English Program, and strengthening family violence protections in partner visa processes.

The Council also welcomed further reforms to settlement services canvassed in the budget to bring about improved settlement and employment outcomes for migrants and refugees.

Melissa Monteiro, Chair of the Council, said "We have long supported reform to settlement services to enhance outcomes for migrants and refugees. Slowed migration presents an opportunity to do this in a considered, thoughtful and evidence-based way."

"As the peak body representing settlement services, the Council will be working closely with the Department to ensure future reforms are informed by the experiences of the sector on the frontline," she said.

Settlement Council of Australia CEO, Sandra Elhelw Wright, said "It is unfortunate that the humanitarian intake has been reduced. However, we welcome the Government's commitment to maintaining a humanitarian intake during a time of crisis and look forward to the humanitarian program resuming at higher levels in the future."

She added that "While the substantial reduction in funding to the sector will create significant challenges for our members, we will work closely with the Department towards a reform program that sees the settlement sector emerge even better placed to contribute to Australia's economic and social success."

Settlement services are an essential part of building an economically productive and socially cohesive Australia. They ensure migrants and refugees adjust to life in Australia, find work, learn English, build a new social network, and can contribute to their fullest potential.

Through their members across the country, the Council is able to draw on decades of experience in successfully settling migrants and refugees. There are countless examples of practices, initiatives and programs delivered by members that could be better embedded in settlement services to improve outcomes.



For example, many services across Australia are working hard to link employers who are experiencing labour supply shortages, such as in regional areas, with migrants and refugees in their services.

There are also programs that teach migrants and refugees how to compete in the Australian job market, and programs that encourage migrants and refugees to establish small businesses. The latter are particularly important for humanitarian entrants, who are twice as likely to be entrepreneurs as the wider population.

Having this economic support located within services that can address holistic settlement needs is essential. Positive employment outcomes are inextricably linked with stable housing, good health, social networks, and other settlement needs.

Ms Wright said "Sometimes a migrant may want to take a job in a regional area, but needs help finding a rental property first. Or perhaps there are health issues that need to be addressed before a person can find work and actively participate in the community. The beauty of settlement services is that they can unpick a range of barriers to social and economic participation across the spectrum of settlement needs."

She continued, "These services are out there every day working hard to support migrants and refugees to reach their full potential. We look forward to working closely with the Department to ensure the policy settings, funding, and contracts for settlement services empower the sector to deliver the best services possible."

"Ultimately, these services are not just about supporting migrants and refugees, but they are also a critical investment in Australia's economic prosperity and social cohesion," she said.

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