

# CALD Women in Leadership, 2023- Western Sydney MRC



Settlement  
Council  
of Australia



**CALD Women in Leadership, 2023**

## AT A GLANCE

**Target participants:** Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women

**Aim of program:** To inspire, educate, and empower CALD women to overcome challenges, become confident leaders, and actively participate in civic engagement.

**Organisations involved / partnerships:** Western Sydney MRC, FECCA, Aspire Leadership Network

**Location:** Western Sydney region

**Sponsors:** Multicultural NSW

## INTRODUCTION

The CALD Women in Leadership Program is a transformative training initiative designed to support CALD women in developing their leadership skills and promoting civic participation. The program was developed in response to the identified need for capacity building and mentorship opportunities for CALD women, as highlighted through community consultations, interagency groups, and research findings.

The project began with a civic participation initiative conducted by Western Sydney MRC from February to May 2022. During this time, community consultations were held with multicultural community leaders representing specific LGAs in South-West Sydney, namely Fairfield, Liverpool, and Canterbury-Bankstown. The consultations sought feedback and interest in a civic leadership program, and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Approximately 70% of attendees in Liverpool, 67% in Fairfield, and 75% in Canterbury-Bankstown expressed a keen interest in participating in a civic participation, advocacy, and leadership workshop.

Furthermore, Western Sydney MRC is actively involved in various interagency groups, including the Liverpool Refugee Migrant Interagency, Refugee Settlement Network (RSN), and CALD Western Sydney Community Advisory groups.

These groups have recognized the need to build sector capability, particularly in developing the leadership capacity of women in multicultural communities. In collaboration with the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA), Western Sydney MRC conducted interviews with CALD female leaders in July-August to document their experiences and further identify the need for capacity building and mentorship opportunities.



**Participants Amira Issa and Lizzie Wong practice active listening, asking three questions, building their skills and capacity in truly listening.**

Research reports have also been reviewed, which highlight the significant structural and systemic gender barriers faced by women from CALD backgrounds. Findings from a survey of 366 CALD female leaders revealed that only 10% felt their opinions were valued and respected, indicating a lack of recognition (Diversity Council Australia, 2017). Additionally, cultural barriers in the workplace have caused one in four culturally diverse women to scale back at work, impacting their ambitions and career progress. These findings emphasise the urgent need to focus on capacity building for this cohort of women.

In response to these insights and community feedback, the CALD Women in Leadership Program was developed. It comprises multiple stages, including a series of training workshops delivered by experts in their respective fields, focusing on leadership, a strength-based approach, communication, and advocacy. These workshops provide participants with valuable knowledge, insights, and practical strategies to enhance their leadership abilities and civic engagement. The program also includes a mentoring component, offering participants opportunities for shadowing, practice, and feedback to further develop their leadership skills. Lastly, the program culminates in a graduation and networking event, providing participants with a platform to celebrate their achievements and connect with like-minded individuals. Additionally, participants have the opportunity to visit Parliament House or meet with local policymakers, reinforcing the importance of civic engagement and advocating for issues that are important to them and their communities.

## POINT OF DIFFERENCE

The CALD Women in Leadership Program stands out for its holistic approach to addressing the specific challenges faced by CALD women in leadership positions. By combining leadership development, civic participation, and advocacy training, the program equips participants with the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence to overcome barriers and actively contribute to their communities.

What sets this program apart is its unique collaboration with state and federal politicians who are champions in their respective fields. These political figures serve as great inspirations for the women, and the program provides ample time for participants to engage with them, allowing for up-close and personal learning opportunities. This direct interaction with influential leaders enhances the participants' understanding of the political landscape and empowers them to navigate it effectively. It adds a valuable dimension to the program, providing participants with insights and connections that go beyond fleeting meetings and contribute to their personal growth and development.

## OUTCOMES

The CALD Women in Leadership Program has achieved several positive outcomes thus far, demonstrating the effectiveness of its approach:

**Enhanced leadership skills:** Participants have reported significant improvements in their leadership abilities. Through the training workshops in areas such as leadership, advocacy, and communication, they have gained valuable knowledge and developed practical skills. As a result, participants feel more confident in their ability to lead effectively and make a positive impact in their communities.

**Increased civic participation:** The program has successfully encouraged participants to actively engage in civic activities. They have become advocates for issues that are important to them and their communities, using their newfound skills to voice their concerns and propose solutions. Participants have had the opportunity to meet policymakers and have their voices heard, which has further motivated their engagement in civic participation.

**Strong networks and support systems:** The program has fostered a supportive and collaborative network among participants, mentors, program organisers, and influential political figures. This network provides ongoing support and mentorship opportunities, allowing participants to learn from experienced leaders and build valuable connections. The establishment of these strong networks enhances participants' sense of belonging and empowerment, contributing to their continued growth and success.

Additionally, the program has gained recognition in parliament, highlighting its significance and impact. This recognition validates the importance of supporting CALD women in leadership roles and contributes to raising awareness of the program's objectives and outcomes.

As the program progresses to the next stage of matching mentors to mentees, it is expected that these outcomes will continue to develop and expand, further empowering CALD women in their leadership journeys.



**Program participants, guest MP speakers and Western Sydney MRC staff and board.**

## CHALLENGES

Designing and implementing the CALD Women in Leadership Program presented several key challenges, including:

- Cultural sensitivity: Ensuring that the program creates a safe and inclusive environment that respects the cultural backgrounds, communication styles, and experiences of CALD women participants.
- Resource allocation: Securing sufficient resources to provide training workshops delivered by experts, engage with political figures, facilitate mentoring opportunities, and organise the graduation and networking event.
- Time commitment: Coordinating schedules and availability of the political figures to ensure meaningful and substantial engagement with the program participants.

## KEY LEARNINGS

As the CALD Women in Leadership Program is still in progress, there are several key learnings that have emerged from the initial stages. While the program is yet to be completed, we can share the following insights:

- **Holistic approach yields positive results:** Taking a holistic approach that combines leadership development, civic participation, and advocacy training has proven effective. Participants have responded positively to the comprehensive support provided, reporting increased confidence, improved communication and advocacy skills, and a deeper understanding of effective leadership strategies. This integrated approach has allowed participants to address multiple facets of their leadership journeys.
- **Impact of personal connections and mentorship:** Engaging with state and federal politicians who are champions in their field has been a valuable aspect of the program. The opportunity for participants to have direct, meaningful interactions and learn from inspiring figures has enhanced their motivation and provided valuable mentorship. This personal connection has proven to be a significant factor in the participants' growth and development.
- **Empowerment through civic engagement:** The program has highlighted the transformative power of civic engagement for CALD women in leadership positions. Participants have become more confident in expressing their opinions, advocating for important issues, and actively participating in decision-making processes. This engagement has not only amplified their voices but also empowered them to create positive change in their communities.



**Women in leadership work on identifying their personality types**

While the program is still ongoing, there are some considerations for future iterations:

- Continuous evaluation and improvement: It is important to regularly evaluate the program's effectiveness and gather feedback from participants. This feedback can inform adjustments and improvements to ensure the program remains relevant and impactful.
- Building diverse mentorship networks: Expanding the pool of mentors to include individuals from diverse backgrounds and sectors can provide participants with a broader range of perspectives and experiences. This can enrich the mentorship experience and offer additional avenues for learning and growth.
- Promoting sustainability and long-term support: Consideration should be given to providing ongoing support and resources for participants beyond the duration of the program. Creating networks and platforms for continued collaboration, mentorship, and skill-building can contribute to the sustained success of program participants.

Overall, the key learnings from running this program emphasise the importance of a holistic approach, the impact of personal connections and mentorship, and the empowering nature of civic engagement. These insights can guide future iterations of similar programs and provide valuable advice to organisations planning similar activities.



**CALD Women in Leadership Program organisers, Western Sydney MRC staff and Board alongside guest speakers (L-R)**

**Sana Al-Ahmar, Nadia Bouchti, Anita Kumar, Dai Le MP, Charishma Kaliyanda MP, Rola Hijwel, Anne Stanley MP and Rachel Haywood.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:**

You can read more on the program on our website [here](#). Read: [Transformative Training Sessions](#).

You can also visit our [website blog](#) to access insightful articles, interviews, and additional information about the program.