Multicultural populations
in North West Victoria

The North West sub-region is a culturally diverse area of the Murray PHN catchment. It has a vibrant agricultural sector with a workforce supplemented by permanent and temporary migrants through programs like the PALM workers scheme, which attracts up to 3500 Pacific Island workers to the sub-region during peak seasons. The city of Mildura is also a key regional settlement location for refugees.
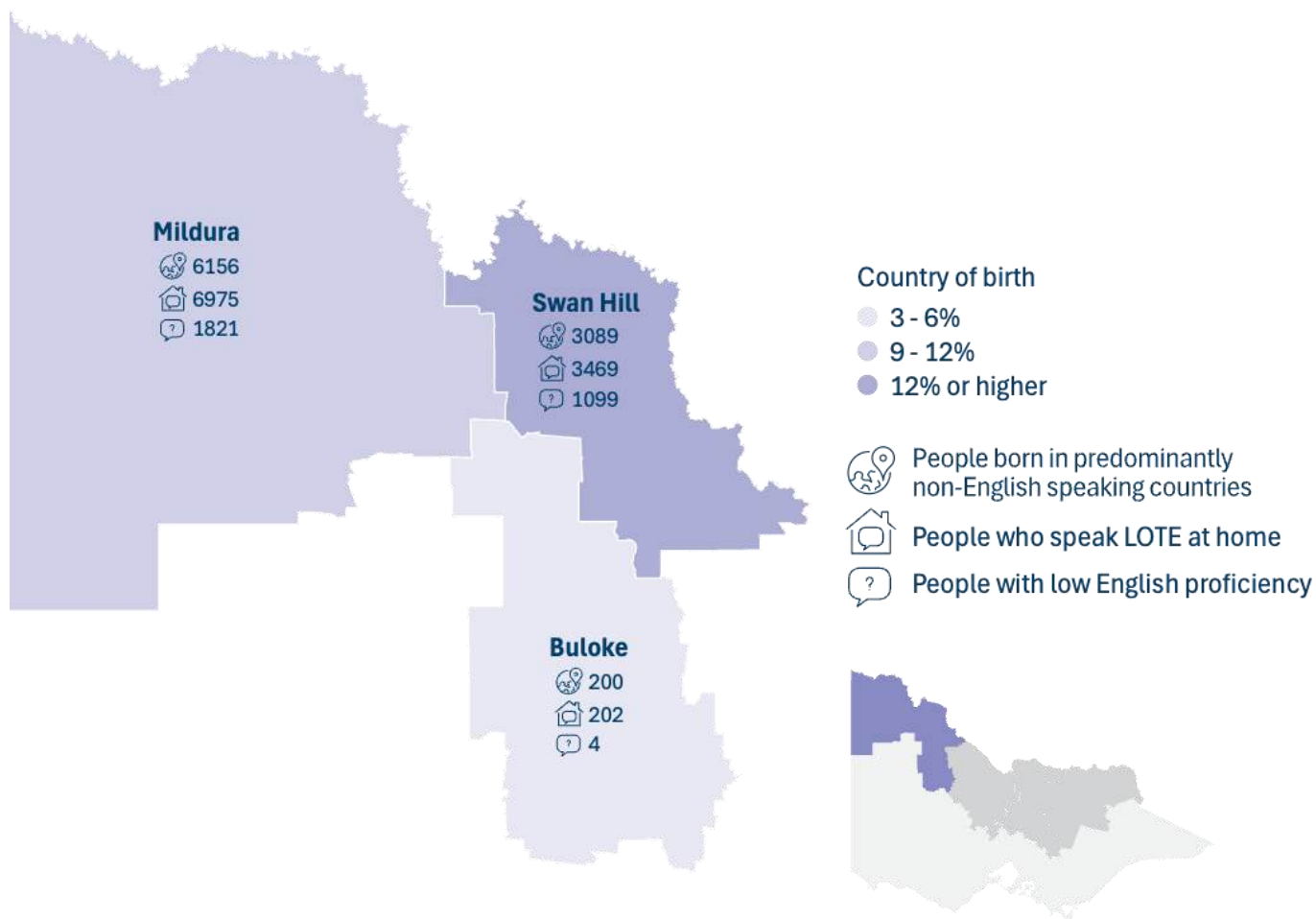
The population of the sub-region fluctuates due to the seasonal workforce, particularly in areas such as Robinvale where local studies have shown the population in peak times is more than double that officially recorded in the Census (Geografia, 2019). Therefore, understanding the health needs of these communities through Census data can be difficult.

Services for multicultural communities in the North West are delivered by a range of providers including Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, AMES Australia, Intereach, Robinvale District Health Services, Swan Hill District Health Service and Sunraysia Community Health Services.

Country of birth

The North West sub-region has a total population of 84,543 people, of which 11.2 per cent are born overseas in predominantly non-English speaking countries.

Figure 1: Population born in NES countries in the North West sub-region by LGA

Table 1 - People born in predominantly non-English speaking countries in the North West sub-region by LGA (by proportion of LGA population) [1]

Rank	LGA	Persons born in NES country	Proportion of all overseas born	Proportion of LGA population	Proportion of Murray total born NESC
1	Swan Hill	3089	87.2%	14.4%	5.9%
2	Mildura	6156	79.6%	10.8%	11.7%
3	Buloke	200	50.5%	3.2%	0.4%

Languages spoken

Key insights about languages spoken in the North West (NW):

- Total of 10,646 people speak a language other than English (LOTE) at home
- This is 12.6 per cent of all residents in the NW sub-region and 19.2 per cent of all people who speak a LOTE across the Murray PHN catchment.

Table 2 - People who speak a LOTE at home in the North West sub-region by LGA
(by proportion of LGA population) [1]

Rank	LGA	Count (persons)	Proportion of LGA population	Proportion of all Murray PHN region LOTE speakers
1	Swan Hill	3469	16.2%	6.3%
2	Mildura	6975	12.2%	12.6%
3	Buloke	202	3.3%	0.4%

Table 3 - Top 10 languages spoken at home in the North West sub-region (by count of persons)[1]

Rank	Language	Count (persons)	Proportion of LOTE speakers in NW sub-region
1	Mandarin	1390	13.1%
2	Italian	1154	10.8%
3	Vietnamese	819	7.7%
4	Malay	768	7.2%
5	Punjabi	622	5.8%
6	Tongan	571	5.4%
7	Turkish	434	4.1%
8	Hazaraghi	358	3.4%
9	Greek	344	3.2%
10	Thai	314	2.9%

English proficiency

- Of those who speak a LOTE in the North West, 28.1 per cent reported low proficiency in English (2924 people)
- This is 30.6 per cent of all people reporting low English proficiency in the Murray PHN region, while the North West is home to only 12 per cent of the total Murray PHN region's population.

Table 4 - People with low English proficiency in North West sub-region by LGA
(by proportion of LOTE speakers within each LGA) [1]

Rank	LGA	Count (low English proficiency)	Proportion of LOTE speakers	Proportion of LGA population	Proportion of Murray PHN region total low proficiency
1	Swan Hill	1099	32.2%	5.1%	11.5%
2	Mildura	1821	26.6%	3.2%	19.0%
3	Buloke	4	2.6%	0.1%	0.0%

Table 5 - Top 10 language groups with low English proficiency the North West sub-region
(by count of persons) [1]

Rank	Language	Count (persons)	Proportion of language speakers in NW sub-region
1	Mandarin	776	55.6%
2	Vietnamese	435	53.6%
3	Malay	268	34.9%
4	Thai	163	50.9%
5	Turkish	155	35.5%
6	Italian	149	12.9%
7	Hazaraghi	139	39.0%
8	Tongan	120	21.0%
9	Cantonese	86	38.6%
10	Punjabi	72	11.6%

Table 6 - Top 5 languages spoken in each LGA in the North West sub-region (by Count) [1]

LGA	Rank	Language
Swan Hill	1	Malay
	2	Mandarin
	3	Vietnamese
	4	Italian
	5	Tongan
Mildura	1	Mandarin
	2	Italian
	3	Turkish
	4	Punjabi
	5	Vietnamese
Buloke	1	Malayalam
	2	Mandarin
	3	Filipino
	4	Nepali
	5	Tagalog

Long-term health conditions

Table 7 - Self-reported long-term health conditions in the North West sub-region by people who speak a LOTE at home compared to the total population (rate per 1000 people) [1]

Health condition	Rate of self-report per 1000 people	
	Speak LOTE at home	Total population
Arthritis	49	101
Asthma	41	99
Cancer	14	31
Dementia	8	8
Diabetes	59	55
Heart disease	29	48
Kidney disease	9	12
Lung condition	7	22
Mental health condition	37	93
Stroke	9	11
Other long-term condition	51	73
No long-term health condition(s)	759	550

*Crude rates are not adjusted for age profiles of the populations which may vary substantially and explain differences between groups.

Cells highlighted red indicate higher rates of ill health compared to whole population

Table 8 - Self-reported long-term health conditions in the North West sub-region for the 10 most commonly spoken languages (rate per 1000 people)[1]

Health condition	Top 10 language groups in the North West sub-region									
	Mandarin	Italian	Vietnamese	Malay	Punjabi	Tongan	Turkish	Hazaraghi	Greek	Thai
Arthritis	6	210	22	0	0	35	90	20	183	0
Asthma	19	81	32	18	11	35	97	20	81	16
Cancer (including remission)	0	63	0	0	0	0	28	0	41	0
Dementia (including Alzheimer's)	0	37	0	0	0	7	7	0	29	0
Diabetes (excluding gestational diabetes)	10	153	35	10	48	140	113	36	108	19
Heart disease (including heart attack or angina)	5	101	18	0	5	49	67	11	84	10
Kidney disease	0	25	9	0	0	23	21	0	20	0
Lung condition (including COPD or emphysema)	0	28	0	0	0	0	18	0	35	0
Mental health condition (including depression or anxiety)	5	86	21	5	0	19	150	50	128	13
Stroke	0	31	11	4	0	5	21	0	20	0
Any other long-term health condition(s)	7	120	37	22	6	23	129	81	93	19
No long-term health condition(s)	921	439	795	893	899	739	537	804	480	882

*Crude rates are not adjusted for age profiles of the populations which may vary substantially and explain differences between groups.

Cells highlighted red indicate higher rates of ill health compared to whole population

Other health issues

Stakeholders reported the following health issues were specific concerns within culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in the North West sub-region:

- Women's and reproductive health
- Domestic and family violence
- Mental health and AOD issues
- Skin and eye conditions for outdoor workers
- Accidents and injuries for migrant workers doing manual or physically demanding jobs.

Service strengths, gaps and opportunities

Strengths

- Some key primary health service providers (such as Sunraysia Community Health Services and Mallee Family Care) were noted as providing culturally appropriate and responsive services
- Collaboration between primary health services in Mildura introduced the use of translated appointment reminders
- Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC) is recognised for strong leadership, coordination and advocacy in the region
- The Sunraysia Settlement Network, coordinated by SMECC, collaborates with various community and government organisations to support the needs of refugee and other CALD communities.

Service gaps and opportunities

- Inconsistent access to on-site and telephone interpreters in primary healthcare services across the region
- A need for more bilingual and/or bicultural health workers in both clinical and non-clinical roles
- Significant lack of access to GP appointments in Swan Hill due to workforce issues
- PALM workers and some migrant groups are ineligible for Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) support, missing out on individualised case management and navigation
- Opportunity to commission formal health navigation services and support more informal health navigation services for vulnerable groups, particularly for PALM scheme workers and their families and other vulnerable groups.

References

1. Source: ABS (2021). Public data: accessible to all audiences