

The *Turkish* COFFEE CLUB PROJECT



Understanding the Emotional and
Social Wellbeing of Older Turkish and Cypriot
Turkish Migrant Women in Wyndham

“We have been left behind”

2025

Acknowledgment of Country

The authors and the women involved in the Turkish Coffee Club Project live and gather on the lands of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders, and families of the Boonwurrung (Bunurong), Woiwurrung (Wurundjeri), and Wadawurrung (Wathaurung) Peoples, who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands of the Kulin Nation.



Authors

Dr. Lutfiye Ali: Community Identity Research Network (CIDRN), and Institute for Health and Sport, Victoria University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Assoc. Prof. Doris Testa: Institute for Health and Sport, Victoria University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Dr. Mayo Konidaris-Kozirakis: Institute for Health and Sport, Victoria University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

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Summary

A culturally informed community consultation was undertaken to explore the emotional and social wellbeing of older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women living in Wyndham. Drawing on survey responses and a sohbet (group conversation) session, the findings reveal that the women's wellbeing is shaped by intersecting power dynamics related to gender, ethnicity, age and their material circumstances. These social identities both enrich the women's lives and simultaneously create barriers to accessing information, services, and for their participation in community life.

The women reported a good sense of emotional wellbeing closely tied to their daily routines, family roles and responsibilities, cultural and religious beliefs, and social connections. Access to Turkish-language digital media also played a supportive role in maintaining their wellbeing. Their social connections not only supported the women's emotional wellbeing but also enabled them to support each other to access information and services. However, in recent years, these social connections have declined, limiting their access to both support and information. This decline was attributed to the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 lockdowns, aging, and shifts in intergenerational family dynamics.

The women also face intersecting barriers in accessing information and services, including limited English language proficiency, low levels of digital literacy, and challenges related to service accessibility. While digital media offers valuable access to culturally relevant content in Turkish, it also presents significant obstacles in accessing digital platforms available only in English. This intersection of low levels of digital skills and limited English literacy reveals a key area of vulnerability in the women's daily lives, reinforcing systemic inequities in accessing online information and services.

The women reported a sense of connection to Wyndham area, however, their participation in local community life was limited. This is due to intersecting barriers including lack of culturally appropriate programs and services, unfamiliarity with local initiatives, physical or digital access constraints, and ongoing language barriers. Limited participation in community life has contributed to a decline in English language proficiency, further compounding their marginalisation and limiting their ability to independently access online information and services.

The role of the North Cyprus Turkish Community of Victoria (NCTCV) in addressing these overlapping challenges is critical. The organisation is well-positioned to create culturally appropriate opportunities that respond to the interconnected issues of aging, language barriers, digital exclusion, and social isolation among older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women.

Introduction and background

Established in 1956¹, North Cyprus Turkish Community of Victoria (NCTCV)², is a not-for-profit community organisation dedicated to promoting and preserving Cypriot Turkish culture, language and traditions. This is achieved through weekly gatherings and luncheons, social activities, events, classes for community members and by providing support for Cypriot Turkish organisations' and community groups. In addition to serving the Cypriot Turkish community, the organisation also provides a welcoming and safe space for many other migrant community groups to celebrate, share and nurture their social, cultural and religious traditions. In response to the community's evolving needs, NCTCV has increasingly focused on developing and delivering intercultural events and programs, alongside social and wellbeing outreach initiatives aimed at supporting Cypriot Turkish elders, particularly those living in Melbourne's western suburbs

According to the 2021 Census, there are 47,015 people in Victoria with a Turkish ancestry (Government of Victoria, 2024). Many Turkish people arrived from Türkiye (formerly known as Turkey) between 1971 and 1980's (Government of Victoria, 2024). Many Turkish speaking people in Victoria also come from Cyprus, who are known as Cypriot Turkish or Turkish Cypriot. According to the 2016 Census, 25.3% (1,918) of the 7,574 Cyprus born people in Victoria speak Turkish (Government of Victoria, 2018b).

In Victoria, Turkish and Cypriot Turkish communities are predominantly concentrated in the City of Hume, and the City of Brimbank, respectively. A smaller, yet significant, number also live in the City of Wyndham (Government of Victoria, 2018a, 2018b). According to the 2016 Census, 558 Wyndham residents identified as Turkish (Government of Victoria, 2018a). By 2023, this number had increased to 841 (Government of Victoria, 2024). The 2016 Census also reported that 2% (238 individuals) of Victorians with a Cypriot ancestry lived in Wyndham along with 2.3% of Turkish speaking, Cyprus born Cypriots in the state (Government of Victoria, 2018b).

The Turkish Coffee Club Project is NCTCV's community outreach initiative for older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women, living in Wyndham. The project emerged from conversations between Lutfiye Ali, a community researcher at Victoria University and the President of NCTCV, and her mother, alongside other older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women living in Wyndham. Drawing on her longstanding connections with the local community in Wyndham, Lutfiye engaged with the women who spoke of the difficulties they faced in accessing programs at NCTCV's centre in Albion, as well as their experiences of isolation and marginalisation. These insights highlighted the need for a more accessible and culturally meaningful initiative, leading to the development of the Turkish Coffee Club project.

1 The Organisation was initially established in 1956 to welcome Turkish wrestlers who travelled to Melbourne for the 1956 Summer Olympics. For more information see: *Yesterday and Today: Turkish Cypriots of Australia* published in 2007 by Serkan Hussein.

2 North Cyprus Turkish Community of Victoria is officially known as North Cyprus Turkish Association of Victoria. Throughout this report, we use North Cyprus Turkish Community of Victoria, as it is the name more commonly used by the organisation and its members.

The project's name was suggested by Lutfiye's mother in 2023, during one of their many conversations about the idea.

The Turkish Coffee Club project is a three-phase initiative aimed at understanding and supporting the emotional and social wellbeing needs of older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women in Wyndham. The first phase involved a one-day community consultation event during which the women had the opportunity to socialise and share their views emotional and social wellbeing. Building on the insights from phase one, the second phase focuses on designing and delivering a culturally informed program that aims to address these needs, while also creating opportunities for participation and volunteering for the women. The third phase of the project will explore the outcomes of the program for the women. The project is supported by a Victoria University research team, Lutfiye, Doris, and Mayo, who are responsible for the research components of phases one and three.

This report presents the findings from phase one of the Turkish Coffee Club Project, focusing on the methodology, the participating women, and the key insights gathered during the Turkish Coffee community consultation event.

Methodology: A culturally informed community consultation event

To connect and understand the needs of older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women living in Wyndham, a community event was organised by NCTCV with the support of the research team³. The event was held on 3 December 2024 at the Wyndham Park Community Centre located in Werribee. As some women were not available on this date, a second session was organised and was delivered on 17 December 2024. The first event was attended by seven women, and the second by ten women⁴.

These consultation sessions centered around the tradition of Turkish coffee, which is regarded as an important part of Turkish cultural heritage⁵. This cultural practice dates back centuries and carries deep social meaning that is expressed in a Turkish saying, "A cup of coffee commits one to forty years of friendship"⁶. The invitation to share Turkish coffee during the event provided the women with an opportunity to reconnect through a familiar cultural practice. It created space that allowed the women to engage in *sohbet* (friendly and meaningful conversation) about their lives.

3 Ethics approval for this project was attained for this project on 25 November 2024 through Victoria University Research Ethics Committee.

4 This event was funded through Wyndham Council's Community Grant Program.

5 UNESCO inscribed Turkish coffee culture on the Intangible Cultural Heritage List in 2013. See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/turkish-coffee-culture-and-tradition-00645>

6 For more information on the history and tradition of Turkish coffee please see Turkish Coffee Culture by Beşir Ayvazoglu 2011: <https://teda.ktb.gov.tr/Eklenti/6594,turkishcoffeeculturepdf.pdf>



Figure 1: Photos from the first consultation event

During the two consultation events, a survey translated into Turkish was used to collect quantitative data on women's emotional and social wellbeing. In the first session, qualitative data was also collected through a sohbet (group conversation) session led by Lutfiye. This session created a safe and culturally familiar space for participants to engage in sohbet about the challenges they face as older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women and to discuss their emotional and social wellbeing in greater depth. The sohbet was recorded using a mobile phone application.

The quantitative data was collated and analysed using descriptive statistics. Relevant sections of the sohbet session were transcribed and translated into English. These transcripts were then analysed thematically using Willig (2021), guided by intersectional feminist thinking. Rooted in Black feminist theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), intersectionality is an analytical framework that examines how overlapping vectors of power, shaped by social identities such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity, produce experiences of both discrimination and privilege (May, 2015). This framework is particularly valuable for understanding the complex realities and systemic inequalities faced by marginalised communities (e.g., Ali & Sonn, 2017; Choo & Ferree, 2010; Tunçer, 2024).

Table 1. Summary of the quantitative and qualitative data

Quantitative data	Qualitative data
<p>Survey</p> <p>-10 responses</p>	<p>Sohbet session</p> <p>-Number of participants: 7</p> <p>-Duration: 50 mins</p>

The women of the project

In total, 10 women⁷ participated in the community consultation event. As displayed in Table 2, the women identified as Turkish, Cypriot Turkish and Macedonian Turkish. With the exception of two women who migrated in the 1990's during middle adulthood, the rest migrated to Australia as young adults between 1950's and 1980's. The women spent most of their lives as mothers providing care for their families. Some also worked part time at local restaurants, factories, and in the textiles industry. Apart from interactions with their immediate neighbours and their children's partners from other cultural backgrounds, the women had limited opportunities to engage with English-speaking communities. As a result, their English literacy skills remained limited. The number of years living in the City of Wyndham ranged from 15-40 years with an average of 30 years. The women reside in Hoppers Crossing, Manor Lakes, and Werribee areas of Wyndham. Many of the women were widowed or divorced, with only three living with their husbands. While most had children, many of them had moved away from home, and have families and established careers.

Table 2. Participant demographics

Pseudonyms	Age	Ethnicity	Year of Migration	Years in Wyndham	Location
Ayla	77	Macedonian Turkish	1996	27 years	Hoppers Crossing
Feray	65	Cypriot Turkish	1975	40 years	Hoppers Crossing
Fayka	70	Cypriot Turkish		15 years	Manor Lakes
Ilkay	64	Cypriot Turkish	1998	28 years	Hoppers Crossing
Aliye	76	Turkish	1982	34 years	Werribee
Beliz	65	Turkish	1984	14 years	Werribee
Selin	71	Cypriot Turkish	1953	38 years	Hoppers Crossing
Zara	83	Turkish	1957	32 years	Hoppers Crossing
Hatice	78	Turkish	1969	35 years	Werribee
Seray	81	Turkish	1975	35 years	Hoppers Crossing

⁷ The names of all the participants throughout this report have been replaced with pseudonyms

Project findings: Emotional and social wellbeing among the women

This section presents the findings from both the survey and the sohbet session with the women. It begins by exploring the women's emotional wellbeing, followed by their social wellbeing. Social wellbeing is considered through several key components, including social support networks, information and service access, participation in community life in Wyndham, and the women's identified social wellbeing needs.

Emotional wellbeing

During the sohbet session, the women were asked to comment on their emotional wellbeing. They described emotional wellbeing as a feeling of "refah" (comfort), sense of "huzur" (inner peace) in daily life, something that can be "created internally from the strength Allah has instilled in humans", by "finding ways to make yourself happy" and "staying positive" and by engaging in "sohbet with friends". Apart from one woman, the survey responses showed that most of the women rated their wellbeing as good, very good or as excellent.

Table 3 provides a summary of their reflections on emotional wellbeing during the sohbet session. It appears that women's emotional wellbeing is closely tied to their role as mothers, grandmothers, and shaped by cultural beliefs and Islam. The findings also revealed that digital media that was accessible in Turkish played a central role in supporting women's emotional wellbeing.

Table 3. Sources of emotional wellbeing

Sources of emotional wellbeing	Description
Daily activities, hobbies, and routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gardening• Reading and listening to books• Cooking• Listen to Turkish music• Art and craft activities, sewing• Physical activities: Walking and dancing• Completing household chores• Reading the Kuran and praying• Watching Turkish series online• Resting
Family roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cooking family dinners• Caring for grandchildren
Social connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and grandchildren• Sohbet with friends
Digital technology	Using YouTube to listen to music and audiobooks, learn new recipes, explore arts and crafts, read the Kuran and pray, as well as watch Turkish series (dizi).

Social support networks

The women's social support networks are primarily confined to immediate family members and friends within the Turkish/Cypriot Turkish community⁸. This is not surprising given their primary gendered role as caregivers within the family and limited social connections. However, they reported a noticeable decline in these networks. This decline was attributed to several interrelated factors related to aging including changing family roles and relationships, reduced mobility, and the Covid 19 pandemic lockdowns. These factors are further elaborated in the section below:

- Intergenerational changes in family dynamics

The women noted that their support networks that was available to them throughout their lives have declined in recent years due to the shifts in roles and dynamics within families:

Carer responsibilities: The women explained that visiting each other's homes has become increasingly difficult because they are required to support their children by caring for their grandchildren.

Children contending with their own challenges: The women noted that the social support that is available to them from their children has reduced due to their children's family and career responsibilities.

Loss of partners: Several women explained that after losing their partners, whom they relied for transportation, are now unable to get to places and oversee to daily tasks independently.

- Mobility challenges

The women noted that as they get older, they are finding it physically difficult to host friends at home. The women explained that this in turn impacts their ability to support one another as they are less able to share and learn from one another⁹.

- Continued impact of Covid 19 pandemic lockdowns

The women also explained that the Covid 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on their lives. In the excerpt below the women discuss how the lockdowns have impact their connections with their friends and lives. It has impacted their need for social connection and confidence in their social skills:

Ilkay: Covid has impacted our lives significantly.

Feray: We sat at home so long that we are now used to staying at home. Occasionally we would go out in the past, but now we don't do that too.

Ayla: We got used to staying at home.

⁸ Although it was not raised as a point during the community consultation event, the women's neighbours from other cultural backgrounds form part of the women's social connections.

⁹ See also Sources of information and support for accessing services

Selin: We also forgot what we know, like how to drive.

Ilkay: Our interest in engaging and being social has declined.

Ayla: Our energy has also declined.

Ilkay: You just want to be at home. People have changed because of covid. People have learnt to be alone

Fayka: Yes, people are afraid to be social.

Ilkay: People have turned inwards.

Lutfiye: Are people unhappy with these changes?

Beliz: Of course we are not happy with being lonely.

Selin: We want to be connected with one another.

In the above extract, Selin shares that she feels less confident in her driving skills. She attributes this decline to aging and the extended period during the pandemic lockdowns when she did not drive. Similarly, Ayla and Ilkay explained how the pandemic lockdowns intersected with the aging process. These women explained that they became less active as they grew older during this time. They also expressed ongoing fear about being in public spaces, due to their older age and the continued risk of contracting viruses:

Ayla: It's also our age. We got used to the isolated life because we have aged, and we are not so active as we used to be.

Ilkay: Yes, being older means we are worried about being in public spaces.

Ayla: Yes, the fear has remained with us.

Information and service access

During the sohbet session, the women reported facing multiple, overlapping barriers, including language, digital literacy, access and service-related challenges, when trying to access information and support. As a result, the women explain that they would often rely on informal networks to obtain information and access services. These findings are explored in more detail below:

- Barriers to accessing information and services

In the following extract, the women speak about the language and service barriers they encounter when trying to access information and services:

Aliye: I can do many things with the help of an interpreter. But accessing an interpreter is not possible. There is a barrier to accessing support.

Ilkay: Yes, accessing information is difficult. Services are not accessible

Ayla: Even when we get pamphlets, they don't have any available in Turkish.

Selin: I don't understand why they don't have information available in Turkish. They threw us at the end of the line.

Aliye: I call a number for information or for service, but the phone call is not always answered.

Beliz: Yes, we wait for some time, sometime up to an hour before someone picks up the phone.

The women also identified digital barriers to accessing information and services, which are further compounded by language barriers:

Ayla: They used to have brochures in different languages but now everything is on the internet.

Aliye: That is the biggest problem, actually. Our generation doesn't understand the internet.

Ilkay: Yes, I tried to make an appointment for my hand over the phone, and I was told I needed to email them. I explained that I don't have children who can help me send an email. They told me to go back to my GP.

Ilkay elaborated on the barriers older migrant women face trying to get to a medical appointment in the city. In the excerpt below, she explains that even when information is available, it does not ensure access. Access barriers associated with age and mobility, including transportation, parking issues, and the need for assistance to navigate the health system, further complicates access to care:

Ilkay: We get information, for example, from newsletters, but accessing services is still difficult. After a certain age, for example, you need to go to the city for a medical appointment, but your reflexes have slowed so you can't drive, or you need transportation, you need to find parking and a parking card to park your car. You need someone to assist you. These are all processes involved in getting to the appointment. These are not easy, and we need information and support to access services.

The types of barriers described by the women are summarised in Table 4. While these challenges are common among many older adults, limited English literacy presents an additional layer of difficulty for the women in accessing information and services.

Table 4. Barriers to information and services

Type of Barrier	Description
Language	Limited availability of information in Turkish language Insufficient interpreter services
Service	Difficulty with accessing services due to poor or declining phone services Insufficient knowledge to navigate and access services
Digital	Increasing digitization of services, making it difficult to those with limited digital and English literacy
Access	Services are physically inaccessible due to mobility, location, and transportation challenges

- Sources of information and support for accessing services

The women explained that, due to the many barriers they face, they often rely on informal sources of support within their social networks. In particular, they depend on their children to help access information and services. However, their children are not always available because of work and family commitments:

Aliye: We are required to ask for the help of our children. I'm lucky that my children help me with my online payments. But not everyone has children that can help them. I also don't want to always rely on my children as they are busy. I feel bad because sometimes they get upset because they are unable to help me when I reach out for their help.

Despite significant barriers to accessing information, the women demonstrated a strong sense of agency and mutual support. The women explained that they help one another with navigating information and services. In the following extract, Aliye explains that she often turns to Ilkay for support. Ilkay plays a key role in sharing the information she learns at NCTCV with others in her social circle. This example highlights the pivotal role of NCTCV, and how social connections facilitate sharing of information, mutual support and the empowerment of the women:

Aliye: Ilkay often helps me and shares information with me. She goes to the Center in Albion, and she shares the information with me. We need people like her who can share information with us. When my husband passed away, Ilkay helped me organise homecare to get the lawn mowed. May Allah praise her.

Ilkay: Yes, I learned about services such as NDIS from the Centre. We have people and services providers who share information. I then shared that information with my friends.

Aliye: Yes, and I then shared this information with Beliz, who then shared it with Hatice.

Participation in Community life in Wyndham

During the consultation session, the women also spoke about community life in Wyndham. Their insights are organised into the following three sections:

-Sense of connection

When asked “How connected do you feel to the local community”, the women’s responses ranged from 1- no connection to 5 - very connected, with an average score of 3.4. Many women explained that they felt a sense of connection because they do not experience “ayrımcılık” (discrimination) or feel “yabancılik” (foreignness). The women who felt connected offered examples including going to the gym and borrowing books from the library, when the Turkish book collection was available. Other women felt connected through their connection to the Turkish community and neighbours from other cultural backgrounds. In contrast other women explained that they felt disconnected as they did not engage with anyone outside of the Turkish/ Cypriot Turkish community in Wyndham.

- Participation in community activities

When asked “How often do you take part in community activities?”, 80% (8/10) of the women said never, and 20% (2/10) said they often take part in community programs. The sohbet between the women further revealed that these community programs were located at other areas including Kensington, Sunshine and Albion.

These findings highlight that, despite being longstanding residents of Wyndham, none of the women have participated in a community group or program within Wyndham. This lack of participation has had an adverse effect on the women’s emotional and social wellbeing, access to information, and connection to the wider community. It also has had an adverse effect on speaking English. The women explained that because they talk in Turkish to one another, their English literacy skills have declined.

Selin: I have lived here for 40 years; there has not been a program for Turkish women in the city of Wyndham.

- *Barriers to community participation*

The women identified complex web of barriers related to gender, cultural and language differences that restrict their participation in community groups and programs in Wyndham. Survey responses to barriers to participation include language, information, transportation, cultural irrelevance, lack the familiarly, as well as family responsibilities as barriers to participation in community life. These survey findings are displayed in Figure 2.

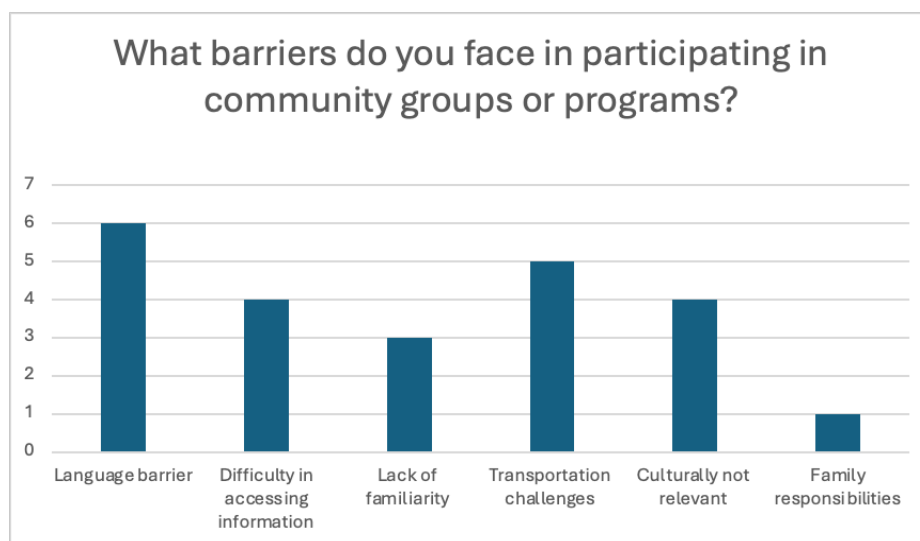


Figure 2. Barriers to participating in community groups or programs

During the sohbet session, the women further emphasised on the language barrier, lack of knowledge and difficulty with accessing information prevented them from participating in community groups and programs. The women noted the lack of culturally appropriate programs, and uncertainty about how to develop such programs. The women also felt that no one has showed interest in them as a cultural group in Wyndham, indicating that smaller and older migrant communities are often overlooked.

Social wellbeing needs

When asked about their social wellbeing needs, the women expressed needs for greater social connection and community participation. The women also expressed the need to develop digital literacy as this impedes their independence and ability to access information, seek services, and their ability to participate in community life.

Beliz: When I first moved here from Kensington, I went to a community Centre to ask about suitable programs. I tried to explain myself, but I couldn't be understood. I tried a few times but then I gave up.

The word cloud below (Figure 3) captures participant responses to the survey question and sohbet about their social wellbeing needs.



Figure 3. The women's social wellbeing needs

The women expressed a need for a social community group through which they could nurture their social wellbeing through shared activities like having coffee and engaging in sohbet. In the following extract, the women explain that such a group would create opportunities to participate in community life and address the social isolation that they are experiencing:

Selin: We need a group to help us come together

Ayla: Yes, perhaps a community group will help us closer to one another, rebuild connection and help us be more active and participate in community life

Beliz: I'd like to form a group, it doesn't matter what background, it would be nice to be part of the community.

Ayla: Yes, because home visiting is not practical, a community group will work well because it will be on a particular day, and we can make time for it

The women also explained that being of similar ages, background and circumstances, the social group would provide emotional and social support and opportunities to share information with one another:

Ilkay: We can learn from one another

Fayka: It will support out mental health

Ayla: Yes, we are all the same age, so we understand each other. And have similar needs

Feray: Being similar in age is going to help us. We can share with one another and debrief and go home with a clear mind.



Conclusion and future directions

The findings from the culturally informed consultation event highlights that the social and emotional wellbeing of older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women is shaped by the intersections of gender, language, culture, religion, and age. These intersecting factors influence not only their emotional wellbeing and social support systems, but also how they access information and support. The women face multiple, overlapping barriers as a result of these intersections, including shrinking social networks, language, cultural, service-related, physical, and digital barriers. Together, these barriers hinder their ability to access information and services and limit their participation in community life.

These findings underscore the need for culturally informed programs that adopt an intersectional approach to address the overlapping challenges of aging, language, cultural and digital exclusion, and social isolation. Such programs should focus on creating safe, inclusive and accessible spaces that foster social connections and support meaningful community participation. The findings also highlight the need for targeted support to improve access information and services, and to help older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish migrant women overcome digital and language barriers.

These findings highlight the need for the North Cyprus Turkish Community of Victoria (NCTCV) to broaden its focus beyond the preservation of Turkish language and culture. While the organisation has historically played a vital role in preserving and promoting Turkish language and culture, it is now called upon to further extend its efforts to include deliveries of culturally responsive programs that support the wellbeing of older Turkish speaking Australians.

NCTCV is uniquely positioned to serve as a crucial bridge between the Turkish-speaking community and local, state, and federal government agencies. Its deep cultural knowledge, and strong community connections enable it to play a pivotal role in ensuring that older community members are not left behind. Responding effectively will require support and collaboration across all levels of government and the community sector. This will help shape a more equitable and inclusive future—not only for older Turkish and Cypriot Turkish women in Wyndham but for the broader Turkish-speaking community across Victoria.

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