

# **Projections of Older Immigrants**

**People from culturally and linguistically diverse  
backgrounds, 1996–2026, Australia**

**by**

**Diane Gibson, Peter Braun, Christine Benham  
and Frieda Mason**

**A report prepared by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
for the Department of Health and Aged Care**

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Any enquiries about or comments on this publication should be directed to:

Aged Care Unit  
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare  
GPO Box 570  
Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: (02) 6244 1190

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# Executive summary

## Background

- This report was prepared at the request of the Aged and Community Care Division of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. It describes the results of a set of projections of the numbers of overseas-born older Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for the period from 1996 to 2026. The projections were calculated at the national, State/Territory and SLA level for each of 50 countries of birth, 34 languages and 30 religions. The projections were undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

## Overview

### 1996 to 2011

- In 1996, the older population from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds<sup>1</sup> numbered 392,800 people, or 17.8% of the total older Australian population. By 2011 it is projected to number 653,800 people, or 22.5% of the total older Australian population. This is a 66% growth rate over the 15-year period, compared with only 23% for the Australian-born population.
- Between 1996 and 2011 the older population from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds not only increases more quickly than the Australian-born in terms of size, it also ages more rapidly. In 1996, 16.3% of the older population from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were aged 80 and over (compared with 22.9% for the Australian-born). The older population from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds was thus substantially younger than the Australian-born. By 2011, this

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<sup>1</sup> Older persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are defined for the purpose of this report as persons aged 65 or over, born overseas in countries where English is not the main language spoken. As currently used by federal government departments the term may include differences that arise from a person's country of birth, culture, language, race and religion but is not restricted to them. These are the five things which are explicitly mentioned in the Charter of Public Service in Culturally Diverse Society (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) 1998). The Charter gives further examples of how this term might be applied in relation to access and equity and the provision of government services but no definitive term has been developed. DIMA is currently working on a new set of indicators of cultural and linguistic diversity to replace non-English-speaking Background (NESB).

The term 'culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds' (CLDB) was developed as a response to the limitations of NESB in that there are many migrants who may speak English well (Malaysians, Indians, Singaporeans) yet have cultural backgrounds which are very different from those of Anglo-Celtic Australians.

proportion is projected to increase to 25.9% (compared with 27.5% for the Australian-born).

- In 1996, 13.2% of the population aged 80 and over were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. By 2011 this is projected to increase to 21.8%. By 2011, then, one in every five people aged 80 and over will be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### **2011 to 2026**

- Between 2011 and 2026 the number of people aged 65 and over from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is projected to increase from 653,800 to 939,800, a growth rate of 44% over the 15-year period. At the same time, the number of Australian-born people aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 59%. Older persons from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are projected to account for 22.5% of the older Australian population at the beginning of the period, and 21.2% at the end.
- Between 2011 and 2026 the proportion of the culturally and linguistically diverse background population that is aged 80 and over is projected to increase from 25.9% (compared with 27.5% for the Australian-born) to 28.7% (compared with 22.4% for the Australian-born). The older population from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds thus ends the projection period with a considerably older population profile than the Australian-born, having begun it with a considerably younger one.
- The numbers for those aged 80 and over are projected to increase from 169,500 to 269,600 (a 59% increase compared with 29% in the Australian-born population). The proportion of people aged 80 and over who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is projected to change from 21.8% to 25.2%. By 2026, then, one in every four people aged 80 and over will be from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

## **Country of birth: major groups, 1996 to 2026**

- In 1996 persons born in Italy were the largest group of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds living in Australia (81,000), followed by persons born in Poland (27,800), persons born in Germany (27,600), persons born in Greece (26,800) and persons born in the Netherlands (25,300).
- In 2011 persons born in Italy are projected to be the largest group of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds living in Australia (117,600), followed by persons born in Greece (70,200), persons born in Germany (43,700), persons born in the Netherlands (37,500) and persons born in China (28,300).
- By 2026 persons born in Italy are projected to be the largest group of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds living in Australia (98,000), followed by persons born in Greece (66,300), persons born in Vietnam (57,700), persons born in China (50,600) and persons born in Germany (45,600).
- Between 1996 and 2011 growth rates are projected to be particularly high among those aged 80 and over born in Italy, those aged 65 and over and 80 and over born in Greece, those aged 80 and over born in Germany and those aged 80 and over born in China.
- Between 2011 and 2026 growth rates are projected to be particularly high among those aged 65 and over born in Vietnam, and those aged 65 and over born in the Philippines.

## Language: major groups, 1996 to 2026

- In 1996 Italian was by far the most commonly used foreign language, being spoken by 79,100 older people. This was followed by Greek (30,400 older people), German (30,000 older people), Polish (17,900 older people) and Dutch (15,600 older people).
- By 2011, Italian is projected to remain the most commonly used foreign language among older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, being spoken by 111,100 older people. This is followed by Greek (74,000), German (33,800), Cantonese (26,400) and Croatian (19,000).
- By 2026, Italian is projected to remain the most commonly used foreign language among older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, being spoken by 82,200 older people. This is followed by Greek (68,300), Cantonese (59,500), Vietnamese (42,100) and Arabic (including Lebanese) (38,600 people).
- Between 1996 and 2011 growth rates are projected to be particularly high in the Italian-speaking population aged 80 and over, the Greek-speaking population aged 80 and over, the Cantonese-speaking population aged 80 and over, the Croatian-speaking population aged 65 and over and 80 and over, the Arabic-speaking population aged 65 and over and 80 and over, the Spanish-speaking population aged 65 and over and 80 and over, and the Maltese-speaking population aged 80 and over.
- Between 2011 and 2026 growth rates are projected to be particularly high in the Vietnamese-speaking population aged 65 and over, the Filipino-speaking population aged 65 and over, the Mandarin-speaking population aged 65 and over, the Spanish-speaking population aged 80 and over, and the Croatian-speaking population aged 80 and over.

## Religion: major groups, 1996 to 2026

- In 1996, 75.6% of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds espoused a Christian religion, followed by Judaism (3.0%) and Buddhism (2.5%). Among Christian religions, Catholic was the most common (47.2%), followed by Greek Orthodox (8.9%), Lutheran (4.6%) and Anglican (3.8%).
- In 2011, 75.1% of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are projected to belong to a Christian religion, followed by Buddhism (2.8%) and Islam (2.2%). Among Christian religions, Catholic again predominates (45.1%), followed by Greek Orthodox (11.2%), Lutherans (3.6%) and Anglicans (3.5%).
- In 2026, 64.0% of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are projected to belong to a Christian religion, followed by Buddhism (5.3%) and Islam (4.0%). Among Christian religions, Catholic again predominates (38.7%), followed by Greek Orthodox (7.0%), and Lutherans (1.9%).

## State and Territory differences

- The Australian Capital Territory had the most diverse older population in 1996, with 24.8% of its older population being immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Victoria (23.1%), the Northern Territory (20.3%) and Western Australia (19.6%) also had higher than average proportions of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. New South Wales (17.7%) and South Australia (17.8%) were very similar to the national average (17.8%). At the other end of the spectrum, both Queensland (10.4%) and Tasmania (7.3%) had lower than average proportions of their populations coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- In 2011 Victoria is projected to have the most diverse older population, with 30.8% (roughly one in three) of its older population being immigrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This is followed by the Australian Capital Territory (26.6%), the Northern Territory (25.9%), New South Wales (24.2%), Western Australia (20.7%), South Australia (20.6%), Queensland (11.6%) and Tasmania (7.9%).
- In 2026 Victoria is again projected to have the most diverse population in terms of cultural and linguistic background (28.3%). This is followed by New South Wales (26.0%), the Australian Capital Territory (23.9%), the Northern Territory (21.9%), Western Australia (18.2%), South Australia (16.1%), Queensland (10.5%) and Tasmania (6.0%).

These projections have been undertaken using a zero migration assumption. This assumption was adopted by the Department of Health and Aged Care because of the importance placed on specific country of birth and small area projections in this project, as both factors were viewed as central for planning purposes. The assumptions required to attribute specific countries of birth to future immigrants and then allocate those immigrants by country of birth to particular aged care planning regions were deemed to be beyond the scope of the present project. The projections presented here should therefore be viewed as a conservative estimate of the likely future size of the older overseas-born population in Australia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> If the 2011 projections presented in this report are compared with the 2011 ABS Series II projections which contain similar assumptions with the addition of a 70,000 person per year immigration intake, the Series II projections yield a 5.3% higher overseas-born population in the age range 65 to 79 years, and a 1.8% higher overseas-born population in the age range, 80 and over.