Cancer Institute NSW

Multicultural demographics data explorer

Language commentary and analysis:
Top languages used at home in NSW

2023

Contents

Introduction

The language profiles in this report analyse the characteristics (age, location, and proficiency in English) of 39 language groups in NSW other than English. Each profiled language group has more than 9,000 people residing in NSW who speak that particular language. The results are based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census, with some comparisons to earlier censuses. Geographic comparisons focus on the Local Health District (LHD) distribution of each language group, and there is Local Government Area (LGA) information where a LGA has significant numbers of residents from a language group.

Age group comparisons focus on the cancer screening cohorts and the percentage of each language group falling into them:

- Breast screening: 50–74-year-old females, comprising 14.3% of the total NSW population (speaking any language).
- Bowel screening: 50–74-year-old persons of either sex, comprising 27.9% of the total NSW population (speaking any language).
- Cervical screening: 25–74-year-old females, comprising 31.7% of the total NSW population (speaking any language).

Commentary is included about the proficiency in English (self-reported on the 2021 Census) for each language group. Proficiency in English is either, 'very well' or 'well', or 'not well' or 'not at all', with some residents not stating their proficiency. Anecdotal evidence suggests the census is often completed by family members for a person who has no English proficiency.

Finally, each profile includes a qualitative analysis at potential future change. This is based on an assumption that existing population will continue to age in their current residence with minimal further internal movement (ageing in place) and that migration from overseas will continue at current levels. It also includes a basic assessment of how many people will retain the language of their parents into subsequent generations.

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Mandarin

Mandarin is the most widely spoken language in NSW after English. The 2021 Census counted 270,685 people who spoke Mandarin at home, an increase of 30,000 since 2016, and more than quadrupling over the past 20 years. This is due to high migration from China and continued use of the language by second-generation migrants. The growth from 2016–2021 was slightly lower than previous census years, as many Mandarin speakers are students who left Sydney during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mandarin speakers in NSW are mostly concentrated in the Sydney region, particularly Northern Sydney (27.2% of total Mandarin speakers in the state) and Western Sydney (23.8%). Overall, 96% of Mandarin speakers reside in the Sydney metropolitan LHDs. The LGA of Parramatta has the greatest number of Mandarin speakers, followed by Georges River. But Mandarin speakers make up the largest percentage of population in Burwood (19.9%) and Ryde councils (13.8%).

Because they are mainly comprised of recent migrants, Mandarin speakers are relatively young compared to the general population in NSW, though the 2021 Census results showed evidence of an ageing population. The largest cancer screening cohort among this population group, is cervical screening (females aged 25–74), which comprised 38.4% of the population. This is higher than the percentage of the general population in NSW who are eligible for cervical screening, which is 31.7%. Bowel screening and breast screening age groups are under-represented among Mandarin speakers, because there is a lower rate of people aged over 50. Bowel screening (50–74 years) comprises 24.6% of the Mandarin-speaking population, and 13.7% fall into the breast screening category (50–74-year-old females).

Mandarin speakers have a relatively high rate of poor English proficiency; with close to one-third (29%) self-reporting they speak English 'not well' or 'not at all'. Because of this, providing cancer-related information in Mandarin is likely to have a great effect.

Arabic

Arabic is the second-most widely spoken language after English in NSW. The 2021 Census recorded 227,243 people who speak Arabic at home (hereafter referred to as 'Arabic speakers'), comprising 2.8% of the state's total population. The population of Arabic speakers grew by over 26,000 or about 13% between 2016 and 2021.

The Arabic speaking population is highly concentrated in the western and southern parts of Sydney. One LHD, South Western Sydney, contains 47.5% of all the Arabic speakers in NSW, and there is 25% in the Western Sydney LHD. At an LGA level, Canterbury-Bankstown has the largest number, with over 63,000 Arabic speakers (just over 17% of the LGA's population), followed by Cumberland and Liverpool LGAs.

Arabic speakers are relatively young compared to the total NSW population, with a high proportion of children aged under 18 – particularly school-aged. Overall, 27.8% of Arabic speakers are over 50-years-old, while 35.8% of people in the total NSW population are aged over 50. In the cervical screening cohort (25–74-year-old females), 30.7% of the Arabic-speaking population is eligible. In bowel screening (all persons aged 50–74), 23.3% is eligible and in breast screening (50–74-year-old females) 11.6%. As a percentage of total population speaking Arabic, these percentages are smaller than those found in the total population speaking any language. But even so, with a large population in this language group, there are still 26,467 Arabic-speaking females in the breast screening age group.

Arabic speakers have a moderate level of English proficiency, with 15.8% self-reporting poor English proficiency or no proficiency in English. Across all languages other than English the figure is 20.8%, meaning Arabic speakers have better English proficiency than many groups. The Arabic community is well established in Sydney, with a high percentage of the population Australian-born.

Cantonese

Cantonese is the third-most widely used language in NSW after English. Speakers mainly come from southern China and Hong Kong (with a substantial minority born in Australia), and there were 148,943 Cantonese speakers in NSW in 2021. Most growth in the Chinese population is among Mandarin speakers, so Cantonese grew only slightly, up by 5,600 speakers (about 3.9%) since 2016 and up by only 28,000 people in the past 20 years.

Cantonese speakers are found mainly in the areas of Sydney which have had large Chinese migration, with the largest number in Parramatta LGA (16,404), followed by Georges River (14,301, and the highest percentage at 9.4% of the LGA's population) and Canterbury-Bankstown (13,588). The largest share of the Cantonese-speaking population by LHD is found in Northern Sydney LHD (25.1%), followed by Western Sydney LHD (22%). The population is highly concentrated in Sydney, with the metropolitan LHDs making up 97% of the total.

The age structure of Cantonese speakers is significantly older than those speaking Mandarin. While there is a peak among people in their 20s, including some students, the largest share of population is in the 50–70 age bracket, which is a peak age group eligible for breast and bowel cancer screening. In total, 31,558 females aged 50–74 were Cantonese speakers or 21.2% of total Cantonese speakers, which is a high percentage for the breast screening target population.

Due to people aged 50–74 years making up a larger share of the Cantonese-speaking population, 38.2% are eligible for bowel screening, compared to 27.9% of the total NSW population. Females aged 25–74, the eligible age range for cervical screening, represented 39.2% of the Cantonese-speaking population. These factors are due to the Cantonese population residing in NSW ageing significantly, with most having arrived in Australia a long time ago.

Among the Cantonese-speaking population, there is a high rate of poor English proficiency, with 26% stating they had poor or no English proficiency. Some of this may be due to ageing, as older populations in many cases revert to their native language and may have difficulty with English.

Vietnamese

Vietnamese is the fourth-most widely spoken language after English in NSW. The 2021 Census recorded 117,907 Vietnamese speakers, an increase of just over 15,000 since 2016 or 14.5%.

Vietnamese speakers in NSW are relatively young, though there is a double peak in age cohorts starting to form. First generation migrants from Vietnam are now aged in their 50s and 60s, where there is a significant number of people. Second-generation migrants are aged in their late teens to 20s and, combined with younger adults recently migrating to NSW, make up a significant number of people as well. Most Vietnamese arrived in Australia from the 1970s onwards, but substantial migration continues today.

The Vietnamese population has more females (54%). This leads to high percentages of people in the two female cancer screening cohorts, with 15% eligible for breast screening (close to the percentage across all language groups) and 37.2% in the cervical screening cohort (higher than the 31.7% average across all language groups). Bowel screening eligibility comprises 28.7% of the Vietnamese-speaking population, or 33,829 people in 2021. There are substantial younger cohorts ageing into these groups in years to come, so this will be an increasing population eligible for bowel and breast screening.

Vietnamese speakers are largely born in Vietnam or Australia. This population group is concentrated in the South Western Sydney LHD, which makes up 68.6% of all the Vietnamese speakers in NSW. The City of Fairfield alone comprises just under 44,000 Vietnamese speakers, where they make up 21% of the total population, with most of the remainder in Canterbury-Bankstown and Liverpool.

There is a high rate of poor English proficiency among those speaking Vietnamese at home, with 32.1% stating that they had poor or no English proficiency in 2021.

Tagalog/Filipino

These two languages are combined because Filipino (the national language of the Philippines) is a standardised version of Tagalog, and many respondents in the 2021 Census stated they use them interchangeably.

When combined, Tagalog/Filipino is the fifth most widely spoken language after English in NSW, with 82,469 speakers recorded in the 2021 Census. This represents an increase of about 13,000 people (+19%) since 2016 and doubling since 2001.

Tagalog/Filipino speakers are primarily aged between 25 and 69, neatly fitting into several of the cancer screening cohorts. Coupled with the fact that it is the most female dominated of the major language groups (58% female, or about 13,000 more females than males), leads to a higher percentage of population in the female screening cohorts.

In 2021, 47.4% of the population were eligible for cervical cancer screening (females aged 25–74), which is extremely high compared to the 31.7% of population across all language groups In the breast screening cohort for females aged 50–74, 20.1%, or 16,552 females, were eligible, which is also high compared to the population across all language groups. For bowel screening (all persons aged 50–74), 33.1% of the Filipino/Tagalog speaking population was eligible, compared to 27.9% across all languages, and in absolute numbers, more than 27,000 people.

Western Sydney LHD has the largest share of the Filipino/Tagalog speaking population, almost 40% of speakers living in this area, followed by South Western Sydney at 16%. Blacktown has by far the largest LGA total, with over 22,000 people, or 27.5% of all Filipino/Tagalog speakers living in this one LGA, and comprising the largest language group in that LGA, making up 5.7% of the population.

English proficiency among Filipino and Tagalog speakers is extremely good, with only 3% stating they had poor English proficiency or could not speak English, one of the lowest for any language group.

Hindi

Hindi, the most widely spoken Indian language in Australia, had 80,051 speakers in NSW at the 2021 Census, and a significant increase of over 13,000 people (19%) as migration from India continues. The largest migration in the 2016–2021 period was in other Indian language groups, but Hindi still increased substantially and is now the sixth largest language after English in NSW.

Hindi speakers are found all over NSW, but 95% are in Greater Sydney, predominantly the Western Sydney LHD, comprising 56% of all Hindi speakers, and 20% in South Western Sydney LHD. At the LGA level, Blacktown had the largest number of Hindi speakers, with 17,429 counted in the 2021 Census, making up 4.4% of the Blacktown City population. Other LGAs with a significant number of Hindi speakers are Parramatta, Liverpool and Cumberland councils.

Like other Indian-born populations, Hindi speakers are concentrated in a narrow band of ages, representing recent skilled migration. Almost half (47.2%) of the population are aged 25–44, and the population is ageing slowly. There is almost an equal number of males and females, and the percentage of people eligible for older-age cancer screening (breast and bowel screening) is low, as the population has not reached this age group yet (50–74-years-old). The breast screening cohort makes up just 9.4% of the Hindi-speaking population and bowel screening, 18.3%. However, these groups are likely to increase, as a substantial number of Hindi speakers are now in their 40s and age into these cohorts from the 2026 Census. For cervical screening, eligibility 25–74-year-old females, the percentage is quite high, with 36.3% of Hindi speakers in this category (approximately 29,000 females).

Like most Indian populations, proficiency in English is very good, with just 4% stating poor English proficiency. This is a very low rate of poor proficiency, implying a high rate of good English proficiency. In terms of targeted language information, Hindi may not be a priority, even though the population is likely to increase in future with further migration from India.

Greek

The 2021 Census counted 78,691 Greek speakers in NSW, a decrease of 2,992 people since 2016 (-3.6%), and one of only two languages in the top 10 to decline. Compared to 2001, there are now 11,400 fewer Greek speakers. Much of Greek migration occurred after the Second World War, making this is an older community in NSW. Nevertheless, it's still the seventh largest language group in NSW after English.

With most first-generation migrants from Greece arriving in the 1950s, and the bulk of them now aged 50+, as well as 21% of Greek speakers aged over 75, many of these residents are outside the eligible age ranges for cancer screening. There is a peak of second-generation migrants speaking the Greek language who are aged 45–60, and are eligible for cancer screening.

A large share of the Greek-speaking population is in the bowel cancer screening cohort (35.1%). cervical screening, is close to the average percentage rate for all languages in NSW, at 32.1% of the Greek-speaking population, while the breast screening cohort (50–74-year-old females) is over-represented due to age, comprising 18.9% of the Greek speaking population. In addition, he second generation migrants aged in their 40s are about to age into the breast and bowel screening groups, which will increase the number of people eligible for these services over the next few years. The Greek-speaking population is slightly female dominated, at 52.5%.

Most Greek speakers live in Sydney, with the largest groups being in the southern and inner west suburbs. South Eastern Sydney LHD contained 36.2% of the Greek population, and 27% is in the Sydney LHD. At the LGA level, Canterbury-Bankstown, Bayside and Georges River have the largest Greek-speaking populations.

Continued ageing and decline of the Greek-speaking population are expected over the next few years, with not many new migrants expected from Greece. The number of people eligible for cancer screening will increase as more people age into the 50+ range.

Proficiency in English for Greek speakers is moderate, with 14.8% indicating they had poor or non-existent English proficiency. This is likely to be an elderly population.

Spanish

The 2021 Census recorded 71,868 people who spoke Spanish at home in NSW, an increase of 8,341 people since 2016 or 13.1%. Spanish is widely spoken in many countries. In NSW, the largest proportion of Spanish speakers are Australian-born, followed by South American-born, and a minority from are from Spain.

With different countries of origin and times of migration, the Spanish-speaking population isn't concentrated in any one area of NSW. The largest share is in South Western Sydney LHD at 22.3%, which is mostly comprised of Chileans residing in Fairfield. South Eastern Sydney LHD has 21.7% and Sydney LHD 14%. At the LGA level, the City of Sydney had the largest number of Spanish speakers (5,054 people), followed by Bayside Council (4,981), Liverpool (4,899) and Fairfield (4,832).

The age structure of the Spanish-speaking population is moderately younger than the total NSW population, with the peak age range at 25–49 years (46.6%), indicating skilled migration from Spanish-speaking countries. There is also a significant cohort of baby boomers who are entering their 70s; these are Spanish speakers from a wave of European migration in the 1950s, like the Italian and Greek migrants. It's a female-dominated population (52.9% female), and among the cancer screening cohorts, the number of people from this population group eligible for bowel screening (25.3%) and breast screening (14.1%) was similar to the number across all languages. Cervical screening (25–74-year-old females) has 38.3% of the Spanish-speaking population in this category (27,539 females), compared to 31.7% across all languages.

English proficiency among Spanish speakers is relatively high, with only 10.9% indicating difficulty speaking English at the 2021 Census.

The Spanish-speaking population is likely to see moderate growth. The language is widely spoken across the world, and while it is declining in some countries, it could be offset by growth in other countries.

Nepali

The Nepali language is a new entrant into the top 10 languages spoken in NSW. Nepalese population in Australia was almost non-existent prior to 2006, but the 2021 Census recorded 68,148 people speaking Nepali at home, almost doubling since 2016 (an increase of 33,542 people) and growing from less than 4,000 people in 2006.

Initially concentrated in Sydney's inner west and south, the Nepali-speaking population has spread throughout Sydney and into regional areas of NSW. The greatest share is in Western Sydney LHD (28.7%), followed by South Eastern Sydney LHD (20.8%). While over 90% remain in Greater Sydney, pockets of Nepali speakers are in Hunter New England LHD and Western NSW LHD. At the LGA level, the largest numbers are in Cumberland Council (10,254), followed by Georges River (8,721) and Bayside (4,735). Albury has the largest number in regional NSW (793), where it is the largest non-English speaking population.

As they are recent arrivals to Australia, including many university students, Nepali speakers are young, with two-thirds (66%) aged between 20–34 years. As such, the percentage of people in the bowel and breast screening eligibility groups are extremely low — less than 2,000 people or 2.8% are in the bowel screening cohort, as there are very few over the age of 50. It's likely to be at least a decade before there is significant growth in this age group among Nepali speakers. For cervical screening (25–74-year-old females), the percentage of eligible people is larger at 28.6% of the Nepali-speaking population, or 19,461 females. This would be the target audience for a cancer screening campaign. The Nepali speaking population is male dominated (54.9% male).

English proficiency among Nepali speakers is very good, with only 5.4% having self-reported poor English proficiency.

The Nepali speaking population is likely to grow in future with further migration but remain young for the near future.

Italian

There were 64,039 Italian speakers in NSW at the 2021 Census, making it the 10th most widely spoken language after English. The Italian-speaking population has been declining in Australia for some time, decreasing 11,655 people between 2016–2021. The population has decreased close to one-third since 2001 when it was the third most widely spoken language in NSW after English.

is the decline is mainly due to the ageing population of Italian speakers, with 26.4% aged over 75 and the a large cohort aged over 85. There are more females (52.2%) than males who speak Italian. However, the largest share of them is older than the eligibility age for the cancer screening programs — bowel, breast and cervical.

Despite this, the share of Italian speakers eligible for each cancer screening cohort is larger than the average across all language groups. Persons aged 50–74 and eligible for bowel screening is 36.8% of the Italian-speaking population, while females in this age group eligible for breast screening is 20.1% or over 16,500 people. The cervical screening group of females aged 25–74 is 32.2%, which is close to the average percentage rate across all language groups. As the Italian-speaking population continues to age and decline due to death, and not enough migration to replace this population, as well as younger generations speaking English at home, the number of people in these cancer screening cohorts will likely decline.

Italian speakers are well spread around NSW, as many have lived in Australia for decades. The traditional home of Italians in Sydney is Drummoyne — part of Canada Bay Council — and has the largest share of the Italian-speaking population, 5,315 people.

Griffith, in regional NSW has 1,339 Italian speakers, where they make up 4.9% of the town's population, however, this has fallen greatly in recent years. Nevertheless, Griffith retains the largest share of Italian ancestry in the state, at 24.2% of population. At the LHD level, Sydney LHD has 24.1% of the state's Italian speaking population, the largest share, but almost 20% live in regional NSW, which higher than many other language groups.

Most Italian speakers have relatively good English skills. Only 11.8% had self-reported poor English proficiency in 2021, but these were predominantly elderly people.

Korean

The 2021 Census recorded 62,319 Korean speakers in NSW, a small increase from 59,912 in 2016. This group doubled in number since 2001 but had a small growth of 4% between 2016–2021. This is due to the large student population from South Korea leaving Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ninety-seven percent of Korean speakers in NSW are mostly in the Greater Sydney area, with the Western Sydney LHD having the largest share, 38.5%, followed by Northern Sydney LHD at 29.2%. At the LGA level, Parramatta has close to a quarter of this population group with 14,190 people, followed by Ryde with 5,792. In Parramatta, Korean is the third most widely spoken language after English, while across NSW it is 11th.

The age structure of the Korean-speaking population represents a working-age population based on skilled migration, with the bulk (45.4%) aged between 25–49. The early 20s age group showed a decline in the 2021 Census due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Korean-speaking population is female dominated (53.1%), leading to a higher percentage of population within the cervical cancer screening cohort (females aged 25–74 making up 37.4% of total population). The other screening cohorts, based on 50–74 age groups, have lower percentages of the Korean-speaking population — 12.8% is in the breast screening cohort and 23.6% in the bowel screening cohort. With the largest share of the Korean-speaking population currently aged in the 40s, there will be increases of people participating in bowel and breast screening in coming years.

Korean speakers have quite poor English proficiency, with 30.1% indicating that they spoke English not well or not at all. This is substantially higher than the 20.8% found across all language groups. A targeted campaign for cervical cancer screening in Korean may be quite effective for this population group.

Punjabi

Punjabi is an Indian language from the Punjab region and its usage is increasing in NSW due to high migration from India. The 2021 Census recorded 53,460 Punjabi speakers in NSW, up by over 20,000 or 60% from the 2016 Census and increasing eight-fold over the past 20 years.

Punjabi speakers follow roughly the same geographic distribution as other India-born populations, but are even more concentrated in Western Sydney LHD, which contains 55% of all Punjabi speakers in NSW. The next largest is South Western Sydney LHD with 11%, and apart from that they are fairly spread out. There are also moderate numbers in places like the Mid-North Coast LHD and Hunter New England LHD in regional NSW. At the LGA level, Blacktown is by far the largest with over 20,000 Punjabi speakers, while as a percentage of population, Coffs Harbour has the highest proportion with 7.9% of population speaking Punjabi at home. Griffith in the Riverina also has a significant population.

The Punjabi-speaking population, like much of the India-born population, peaks in the 25–40 age range, representing skilled migration. Forty-three percent of all Punjabi speakers in NSW are in this narrow cohort, compared to 21% of total population. There are also a lot of young children, with 8.5% of the population aged under 5, indicating families. Among the cancer screening groups where the eligibility age range is 50–74 years, the number of people eligible is generally much lower than the average across all language groups. Of the Punjabi-speaking population, 5.7% is eligible for breast screening, and 11.4% is eligible for bowel screening, while 30.8% is eligible for cervical screening (ages 25–74). The cervical screening percentage is similar to the average percentage across all language groups. Overall, the Punjabi speaking population is male-dominated, with males making up 53.9% of all persons.

Like most Indian languages, English proficiency is generally good among Punjabi speakers, but 8.8% of people indicated poor English proficiency, higher than many other Indian communities.

There are no signs of the large Indian migration to Australia dropping off soon. So Punjabi speakers are likely to continue to rise in number (assuming a continued mix of languages consistent with past migration). Initially most will be of the younger age groups, but in about 10 years, we will start to see increases in the 50+ age range, increasing the number of people eligible for breast and bowel screening.

Urdu

Urdu is a major language spoken primarily in Pakistan. The 2021 Census recorded 46,618 Urdu speakers in NSW, increasing by 16,896 people or 57% since 2016 and increasing six-fold in the past 20 years.

Urdu speakers are mainly distributed in Western Sydney LHD (42.5%) and South Western Sydney LHD (25.7%), with 93% of this language group residing in the Greater Sydney area. At the LGA level, Canterbury-Bankstown, Blacktown and Cumberland councils have the highest representation.

Urdu speakers show a 'young family' age profile, with peaks among 25–39-years-old and children of all ages. Under 15s comprise 27.3% of Urdu speakers, compared to 18.2% across all languages. The Urdu speaking population is highly male dominated (55.8% male) and young. This means there are relatively low numbers of people in the cancer screening cohorts. Overall, just 4% of the population is in the breast screening cohort (few women in this population aged 50–74), and 9.5% are in the bowel screening cohort. However, 25.3% are in the cervical cancer screening cohort (25–74-year-old-females).

The self-reported English proficiency of Urdu speakers is relatively good with only 6.6% reporting poor English proficiency. Therefore Urdu is probably not a language requiring a targeted screening campaign in the language.

Bengali

Bengali is the official language of Bangladesh and is also widely spoken in parts of India. The 2021 Census recorded 39,604 people who spoke Bengali at home in NSW. Like many languages from the Indian subcontinent, this is a growing group, though not as fast as some others, increasing 7,917 people in five years (25% growth).

The Bengali language in NSW is mainly concentrated in South-Western Sydney LHD, where 32.6% of the NSW Bengali-speaking population lives, and Western Sydney LHD (22.8%). The LGAs with the most Bengali speakers are Canterbury-Bankstown (9,223) and Campbelltown (7,475). In Campbelltown, it is the most widely spoken language after English, with 4.2% of the population.

Like most populations from the Indian subcontinent, Bengali speakers are relatively young, with a peak among 25–44-year-olds and young school-age children. Residents of this population group are more likely to be in family groups than some of the other language communities in NSW. There are relatively few people over the age of 50 speaking Bengali, so the breast screen (5.2%) and bowel screen (12.5%) cohorts are well under-represented compared to some other languages. There are also more males than females (52.4% male). There is, however, a significant group in the cervical cancer screening cohort, with 12,527 females aged 25–74, 31.6% of population (close to the average percentage of all language groups). There are large populations in their 40s, so the older screening cohorts are likely to increase over the next decade. Continued migration from India and Bangladesh is likely to continue to boost the population of Bengali speakers, while those already residing in NSW will age in place.

English proficiency is generally very good, with only 7.2% of Bengali speakers having self-reported poor English proficiency.

Tamil

Tamil is a language mainly from the south of India and Sri Lanka. In the 2021 Census, there were 38,446 Tamil speakers recorded in NSW. This was an increase of 8,765 (29%) people since the 2016 Census. Like many Indian languages, Tamil has increased dramatically in recent years.

The geographic distribution follows Indian and Sri Lankan migration, and is heavily concentrated in Western Sydney LHD, which contains 62% of the Tamil speaking population. The next largest share is in Northern Sydney and Sydney LHDs, each around 10% of Tamil speakers. Over 96% of Tamil speakers are in the Greater Sydney region. At an LGA level, Blacktown, Parramatta and Cumberland councils have the largest numbers of Tamil speakers.

The Tamil-speaking population age structure is representative of skilled migration, with peaks among the working-age population, and a significant number of school aged children. The narrow age band of 30–44 made up just over one-third of Tamil speakers in 2021. There are relatively fewer aged over 50 but a higher proportion than many other Indian languages.

There are slightly more male Tamil speakers than female (51% male), and there are many Tamil speakers in NSW who are eligible for cancer screening. Breast screening has 10.4% of the Tamil speaking population eligible (females aged 50–74) and 21.3% are in the bowel screening cohort (all persons aged 50–74). These percentages are smaller than the average across all languages but higher than the populations speaking other Indian languages. The cervical screening group (females aged 25–74) is a little higher than the average across all languages, taking in 32.5% or 12,495 female Tamil speakers.

Tamil English proficiency is generally very good, with only 6.7% of the population stating difficulty speaking English at the 2021 Census (20.8% across all language groups other than English).

The Tamil language has increased at a moderate to high rate recently, and with continued Indian and Sri Lankan migration, is likely to continue to increase in future. With a large cohort aged 40–44, there will be a significant influx of the Tamil-speaking population age into the bowel and breast screening cohorts in the next 10 years.

Assyrian/Aramaic

Assyrian/Aramaic comprises two versions of the ancient Assyrian language, spoken primarily by people from Iraq and Syria. These are Assyrian Neo-Aramaic and Chaldean Neo-Aramaic. They are considered together in this report to enable comparison over time, and due to the mutual similarity of the languages.

In 2021, there were 38,075 Assyrian/Aramaic speakers counted in NSW, an increase of 8,331 people since 2016 (28% increase). Continued migration from Iraq and Syria is driving this increase and these countries are profiled separately in the Cancer Institute NSW Multicultural Data Tools report *Birthplace commentary and analysis: Top countries of birth in NSW*. The age structure of the Assyrian-speaking population is similar to, and only slightly younger, than the NSW average in 2021. There are a lot of children, with the peak five-year age cohort being 10–14 years. Among the cancer screening groups, Assyrian/Aramaic speakers have slightly lower proportions of people (compared to proportions across all language groups) eligible for breast screening (50–74-year-old females) and bowel screening (50–74-year-old persons); 13.3% sit in the breast screening cohort, and 26% in the bowel screening cohort. But there is a higher proportion of females in the cervical screening age group (25–74-year-old females) with–11,834 females or
31.1% of the Assyrian/Aramaic population.

The Assyrian/Aramaic population is one of the most concentrated of any language group in NSW. South Western Sydney LHD is home to 89% of NSW's Assyrian/Aramaic speakers, with 65% being in the Fairfield City Council area and a further 19% in the Liverpool LGA.

Assyrian/Aramaic speakers in NSW in 2021 had a low rate of English proficiency, with 27.2% reporting poor or non-existent English proficiency. Those speaking the Chaldean version of the language had a higher rate of poor English proficiency at 31.4%. This could be a target group for a cancer screening campaign, particularly for the large cervical screening group, and has the advantage that it could be geographically focussed on the Fairfield and Liverpool areas.

Indonesian

A total of 32,303 Indonesian speakers were resident in NSW at the 2021 Census, a modest increase of 2,271 (7.5%) people since 2016. Compared to other census periods, migration of this group was lower in the 2016–2021 period due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many students from Indonesia left Australia when universities abandoned face-to-face learning.

Indonesian speakers are mainly found in Greater Sydney and particularly around inner city and education precincts. The largest share of Indonesian speakers is in the South Eastern Sydney LHD (32.8%), followed by the Sydney LHD (18.8%). At the LGA level, Canterbury-Bankstown had the highest number of Indonesian speakers (4,465) but the City of Sydney had the highest proportion of population speaking Indonesian (4,376 people or 2.1%).

Indonesian speakers are relatively young, being clustered between the student age group of 20–24, and a young workforce aged in the 20s and 30s. The Indonesian-speaking population is over-represented up to the age of 49, meaning that if they stay in Australia, they will soon be ageing into the older cancer screening cohorts where the eligible age range is 50–74.

The 2021 Census showed 11.8% of Indonesian speakers in NSW is eligible for breast screening, 21.6% eligible for bowel screening, and 38.4% for cervical screening. This cervical screening proportion is high compared to the total across all language groups (31.7%) due to a large share in the 25–49 age range and a female-dominated population (the total population speaking Indonesian is 54% female).

English proficiency among Indonesian speakers is generally quite good, with only 9.9% stating poor English proficiency, compared to 20.8% across all language groups.

The Indonesian-speaking population has been growing for some time but plateaued during the COVID-19 pandemic. With the return of face-to-face learning at universities, this population group is likely to grow in future, though not as strongly as some other language groups.

Portuguese

There were 30,258 Portuguese speakers counted in NSW at the 2021 Census, an increase of 7,255 (31%) people since 2016. The population has approximately doubled in 10 years. Portuguese speakers have two distinct groups, the majority from Brazil, with a significant minority from Portugal or born in Australia.

The largest share of Portuguese speakers is found in South Eastern Sydney LHD (32%), followed by Sydney LHD (21%) and Northern Sydney LHD (19%). There are also smaller groups in regional NSW including Northern NSW, the Illawarra and Hunter New England LHDs. At the LGA level, the Northern Beaches had the greatest number (3,492 people), followed by Bayside (3,100).

Portuguese speakers are generally concentrated in the younger adult/working age population age groups, with more than half (52%) aged between 25 and 44. There are average numbers of young children under five, but very few school-age children and relatively few who are elderly. The target populations for breast screening and bowel screening (ages 50–74) are very small in this population group (9.2% in the breast screening cohort and 17.1% in the bowel screening cohort). But the cervical cancer screening group is large, at 39.2% of the population, due to the concentration of working-age population and a slightly female dominated population (51.6% female).

In terms of English proficiency, 11.9% of Portuguese speakers reported poor proficiency in 2021, which is below the average of 20.8% across all language groups other than English, however still higher than many other groups.

The Portuguese speaking population of NSW has grown substantially and is likely to continue to grow. Raw numbers in the older cancer screening age groups (50–74) will increase in future as the existing large population in their 40s age in place. More migration from Portuguese speaking countries is likely as well.

Macedonian

The 2021 Census recorded 28,091 Macedonian speakers in NSW, a decrease of just 53 people (virtually stable population) since 2016, however the population has decreased more than 2,500 people since 2001.

Macedonian speakers are mainly concentrated in the LHDs of South Eastern Sydney, South Western Sydney and Illawarra Shoalhaven. These three LHDs make up 80% of the speakers across NSW. At the LGA level, the Wollongong City Council had the largest number (4,535), followed closely by Bayside (4,517). Due to the large population in the Wollongong and Southern NSW areas, Macedonian speakers have one of the largest populations outside of Greater Sydney.

The Macedonian-speaking population represents an older wave of migration from the 1950s, substantially associated with the Snowy Hydro Scheme. This group consists of 35.2% aged over 60, and a peak of second-generation Macedonian speakers aged 40–54. There are few children who speak Macedonian.

Due to this age distribution, the cancer screening cohorts for people aged 50–74 (breast and bowel screening) are over-represented. A total of 18.6% of the Macedonian-speaking population (or 5,228 females) fall into the breast screening cohort, while 36.5% fall into the bowel screening cohort (50–74-year-old persons). There is also a moderately high population in the cervical cancer screening age group of 25–74-year-old females, comprising 34.5% of population. The peak among people in their 40s is likely to increase the number of people eligible for breast and bowel screening over the next decade. The number of Macedonian speakers will probably continue to decline due to deaths in the older age groups and low recent migration.

A moderate 15.8% of Macedonian speakers (4,438 people) reported poor English proficiency, lower than the average across all language groups (20.8%), but it is likely that many of these are in the older population.

Thai

A total of 28,034 Thai speakers were counted in NSW at the 2021 Census. This was an increase of 3,195 people or 13% since 2016. This growth was slower than the previous censuses, probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic slowing migration. The Thai-speaking population increased 300% (four-fold increase) since 2001.

Eighty-five percent of Thai speakers are found in Greater Sydney, with the largest shares in South Eastern Sydney LHD (28%) and Sydney LHD (16.7%). These reflect the areas with universities and employment opportunities. At the LGA level, the City of Sydney contained the largest number of Thai-speaking residents at 5,916. In the City of Sydney it was the third most widely spoken language after English and the two main Chinese languages. Other LGAs with significant numbers include Canterbury-Bankstown and Bayside councils.

Thai speakers in NSW are relatively young, with an age structure indicative of skilled migration for work and education. Almost two-thirds (62.7%) were aged between 25–49 at the 2021 Census and there are few elderly and few children.

Thai speakers are among the most female-skewed of any language group in NSW (65.7% female). Because of this, Thai speakers make up the greatest proportion of population of any language group (54.4%) in the cervical cancer screening cohort of females aged 25–74. This represents 15,263 females, a much larger number than many other language groups which have higher populations in total.

In contrast, the breast screening cohort (50–74-year-old females) only makes up 11.5% of Thai speakers, while bowel screening is 16.8%, both well below the percentages found in the wider population speaking any language.

Thai speakers have relatively poor self-reported English proficiency. In 2021, 23.7% of the population (6,634 people) reported that they spoke English 'not well' or 'not at all'. This indicates that a targeted language campaign for cervical cancer screening could be worthwhile for the Thai speaking community, given the large numbers in this cohort and relatively low English proficiency.

Gujarati

Gujarati is an Indian language, and the characteristics of Gujarati speakers are relatively similar to those speaking other Indian languages. The 2021 Census counted 26,857 Gujarati speakers resident in NSW, up by 7,984 people from 2016 (a 30% increase), consistent with high migration from India.

More so than other Indian language groups, the Gujarati speakers in NSW are concentrated in Western Sydney LHD, which accounts for 71% of the total. The rest are spread out across metropolitan Sydney, and there is a significant pocket in the Murrumbidgee LHD. At the LGA level there are 9,380 (nearly 40%) in the Blacktown City Council area, and a further 4,325 in Parramatta. Griffith, in the Murrumbidgee LHD in western NSW, has 947, which is a significant concentration outside of Sydney and makes up 3.5% of Griffith's total population, the largest percentage share of population for Gujarati of any LGA in the state.

Like other Indian communities, Gujarati speakers have a young age profile representative mainly of skilled migration. However, they also are more focussed on the family age groups, with children aged under 10 making up 17% of total population. However, the bulk of the population are aged 25–44 (51%), similar to other Indian populations.

Among the cancer screening cohorts, only 2,791 Gujarati speakers are aged 50–74, making up 10.4% of this population group. This equates to a low percentage in the bowel screening cohort when compared to the average for all language groups. Females in this age group are eligible for breast screening but this was only 5.4% of Gujarati speakers, compared to 14.3% of the total population in NSW. The cervical screening cohort of 25–74-year-old females has 32.6% of Gujarati speakers, just under one-third. This is despite the population being slightly male dominated (52% male).

Like most Indian-language groups, Gujarati speakers have generally good English proficiency, with only 7.9% reporting poor or no English proficiency.

The Gujarati speaking population is likely to continue to grow with further Indian migration. As this is currently a young population in NSW, it will take a while for it to age into the breast and bowel cancer screening cohorts.

Persian

Persian speakers are mainly from Iran (excluding the Dari and Hazaraghi languages, which are mainly from Afghanistan). In the 2021 Census, 26,796 Persian speakers were counted in NSW, up by 4,792 from the 2016 Census (22% growth).

There are two distinct Persian speaking communities in Sydney — the Western Sydney LHD has 44% of the Persian-speaking population (primarily in Parramatta and Blacktown, plus parts of The Hills Shire). The Northern Sydney LHD has 30%, which is mainly in Hornsby. Most of this population group is found in an arc through north-west Sydney from Hornsby to Parramatta.

The Persian-speaking population shows a tight peak of age groups in the working ages — 42% of the population is in a 15-year cohort from 30 to 44 years. Some are families with children speaking Persian as well, but there are very few elderly. The population is close to 50-50 male/female, with slightly more males.

Among the cancer screening cohorts, there is a relatively small proportion of Persian speakers aged over 50. In breast screening, 10.2% of this population group is eligible for the screening, and 20.1% is eligible for bowel screening. These are smaller percentages than the average percentage rate across all language groups in NSW. However, cervical screening (for females aged 25–74) comprises 36.2% of the Persian-speaking population (9,705 females), higher than the average across all language groups (31.7%).

There is a moderate rate of poor English proficiency among Persian speakers, with 14.1% indicating they had difficulty speaking English at the 2021 Census.

Turkish

The 2021 Census counted 23,842 Turkish speakers in NSW, representing an increase of about 10% or 2,222 people since 2016. The population has been relatively stable for some time, showing just this recent increase.

The Turkish-speaking population is mainly in Western Sydney LHD (46%) and South Western Sydney LHD (18%), with smaller populations in other parts of Sydney, and the Illawarra Shoalhaven LHD. At the LGA level, Cumberland Council has 6,735 Turkish speakers, more than a quarter of the state's total.

Turkish speakers have a broader age distribution than many other languages, indicative of an established population with many multi-generational speakers and continued migration over time. While there are very few elderly people, many Turkish speakers are in their 50s and 60s, while there is a moderate peak in population from the ages of 25–55.

Among the cancer screening cohorts, the Turkish population has an even male-female split. In total, 14.9% of speakers fit in the breast screening cohort (females aged 50–74), while 28.7% fit in the bowel screening cohort (all persons aged 50–74). Both these cohorts are similar to the average percentage across all language groups. For cervical cancer screening, this was the largest group among Turkish speakers, with females 25–74 making up 34.1% of population, approximately 8,100 people in 2021.

Approximately 19.1% of Turkish speakers in NSW had poor or no English proficiency (self-reported). This is a moderately high rate among all language groups.

The established Turkish speaking population is likely to age further in future years. With only low-moderate levels of migration there will be increases in the older population over time.

French

The 2021 Census recorded 23,574 French speakers in NSW, a decline of about 170 people since 2016. French is widely spoken in many countries, with the largest proportion of French speakers in NSW coming from France, born in Australia, Mauritius, the United Kingdom and Canada.

French speakers are mainly in the inner and eastern suburbs of Sydney, and the North Shore. The South Eastern Sydney LHD had the largest share (28.5%), followed by Northern Sydney LHD (20.9%) and Sydney LHD (13.5%). But, comprising many different cultural groups, French speakers were more distributed across the state than many others. At an LGA level, the largest number were in the Northern Beaches (2,521), followed by Randwick (2,424) and City of Sydney (2,086).

French speakers have an age structure not too dissimilar to the total NSW population, but with more young children and (likely) their parents aged in the 30s and 40s. There are relatively few teenagers and people aged in the early 20s, and also fewer elderly than the total population.

In terms of cancer screening cohorts, 11.7% of French speakers were in the breast screening cohort (50–74-year-old females), while 22.2% were in the bowel screening cohort (50–74-year-old persons). These are both smaller than the total population average across all language groups in these cohorts. French speakers are slightly female dominated (52% female), and coupled with the peak age groups this leads to 34% of speakers being in the cervical cancer screening cohort (25–74-year-old females), a little higher than the 31.7% average share across all language groups.

French speakers have extremely good English proficiency, with only 3.4% reporting poor or no English proficiency. Not only is this much lower than the average across all non-English speaking populations, but it's also lower than the proportion (4.5%) taking English-speakers into account.

The French-speaking population has been growing for some time, and only declined slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic when many migrants returned overseas. It is likely to continue to increase slowly, but with some ageing into the future.

Serbian

The 2021 Census recorded 22,907 speakers of Serbian resident in NSW, up by 2,434 people in five years (12%).

The South Western Sydney LHD contained almost half this population (46%), followed by South Eastern Sydney LHD (12%). At the LGA level, Liverpool (5,397) and Fairfield (3,343) had the largest numbers, followed by Wollongong (1,533) — the only significant population outside Greater Sydney.

Serbian speakers are somewhat older than the NSW population average, with a spread of age groups broadly similar to the NSW population, however more concentrated in the 'baby boomer' age groups (late 50s to early 70s).

There are few children speaking Serbian — only 4% of Serbian speakers were under the age of five. The population is ageing, with the 80+ age group showing the largest increase in the 2021 Census.

Among the cancer screening cohorts, there are about 1,000 more females than males in the Serbian speaking population, leading to higher percentages of population in the breast screening (18.8% of population) and cervical screening (35.8%) target groups. With the largest share of the population aged over 50, the bowel screening group, targeting all persons aged 50–74, is also large, making up 34.9% of population or 7,993 people in 2021.

Serbian speakers have a moderate rate of poor English proficiency, with 16.5% stating they had difficulty with English at the 2021 Census.

The Serbian-speaking population had something of a surprise increase from 2016–2021, after being stable and ageing for many years. Some of this may be due to the greater Census count of people recorded at home in 2021 due to COVID-19. It is not expected to increase a lot in future, but there will be substantial ageing into the 70+ categories as the largely baby-boomer age population continues to advance in years.

Malayalam

Malayalam is an Indian language, with 20,890 speakers in NSW at the 2021 Census, an increase of 7,009 (50%) since 2016, having risen from only 1,266 people in 2001.

Compared to some other Indian languages, Malayalam speakers are quite geographically dispersed, though there is a concentration of them in Western Sydney (33%) and South Western Sydney (17%) LHDs. At an LGA level, Blacktown, Parramatta, Cumberland and Campbelltown have the largest numbers, but there are smaller but significant populations outside Sydney in LGAs such as Wollongong, Wagga Wagga, Newcastle and Maitland.

The age structure of Malayalam speakers indicates young families, with a peak between 30–44 years (43% of population) and 0–14 years (26% of population). There are very few over the age of 50. But if ageing in place in this community continues, in the next 10 years, there will be a large influx into the 50+ age groups (migration of young people may offset this in percentage terms though).

For the cancer screening cohorts, the breast screening and bowel screening cohorts, being older populations, have very low proportions of the Malayalam speaking population. Only 4.4% of the population were in the breast screening cohort, and 9.8% in the bowel screening cohort. These are among the lowest percentages of any language. The sex ratio is almost 50-50 for Malayalam speakers, but the high proportion of people in their 30s and early 40s lifts the cervical screening cohort to slightly above average, at 32.4%, or 6,758 females.

Like most Indian language speakers, English proficiency is quite good among those speaking Malayalam, with only 5.7% indicating difficulty with English at the 2021 Census.

Croatian

There were 20,420 Croatian speakers resident in NSW at the 2021 Census, a decrease of 736 people (3.6%) from the 2016 Census. This group has seen one of the most significant population declines recently, with over 5,000 fewer speakers than there were in 2001.

Croatian speakers are fairly dispersed within the Sydney region, but 87% were in Greater Sydney. The largest share of the Croatian-speaking community was in South Western Sydney LHD (29%), followed by Western Sydney LHD (19%) and South Eastern Sydney LHD (16%). At the LGA level, the largest number were in Fairfield, followed by Liverpool and Cumberland councils.

As a declining population group representing an older wave of migration, Croatian speakers are mainly in the older age groups, particularly baby boomers in their 60s and 70s, plus a larger share of population in the 40s to early 50s. There are significant numbers of children speaking Croatian, but lower than the NSW population average in percentage terms.

Among the cancer screening groups, Croatian is quite highly represented, due to an older population and female-skewed (52.7% females). The bowel screening cohort makes up 36% of all Croatian speakers — over 7,300 people. Breast screening eligible females make up 20.1%, substantially higher than the 14.3% of population in this group across all language groups. This is a key target population of over 4,100 Croatian speakers. The cervical screening group is also a little larger compared to all language groups, at 33.5% of Croatian speakers, approximately 6,800 females.

As the population ages, the large cohorts aged in the 40s will enter the breast and bowel screening groups. Though the overall population is likely to decline further in coming years, the older cohorts will continue to expand.

Croatian speakers in 2021 had a moderate level of English proficiency, with 12.7% stating that they had poor or no English proficiency.

German

The 2021 Census recorded 20,161 German speakers in NSW. This was one of the larger declines among the predominantly European languages decreasing in number each census, down by 2,872 people over five years after relative stability for the previous few censuses. This decline may be due to temporary migrants moving back to Germany during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The geographic distribution of German speakers is quite scattered throughout NSW. The language has one of the larger shares in regional areas, with 27.6% outside of Sydney. Nevertheless, the largest share was in the Northern Sydney LHD (23.8%) followed by South Eastern Sydney LHD (15.7%).

At an LGA level, the largest number are found in Northern Beaches Council (2,256 people), followed by the City of Sydney, while coastal areas such as Wollongong, Lake Macquarie and Byron have relatively high percentages of the population speaking German.

German speakers arrived in Australia over a wide range of years, and so the age structure is very mixed. There is a large elderly community, with 75% making up 16.6% of the total German speaking population. These probably represent post Second World War migrants. There are moderate proportions of family formation and worker age groups, while, interestingly, 6.8% of the German speaking population are aged under five, compared to 5.8% of the total NSW population.

The German speaking population is female dominated (54%) but this is mainly due to the elderly groups, and it doesn't lead to substantially more in the female cancer screening age groups.

Among the cancer screening cohorts, 14.7% of the German-speaking population is in the breast screening target group, and 27.2% in the bowel screening group. Both these are very close to the population average across all language groups. Cervical screening (25–74-year-old females) was just slightly above average as a percentage of population (32.8%).

English proficiency among German speakers is extremely high, with only 2.7% self-reporting poor English proficiency, the lowest among all the top 40 language groups.

The German speaking population is likely to remain stable or decline, unless there is an influx of backpackers or business migrants following the COVID-19 border reopening. The population is very elderly and there isn't a large group coming through into the screening cohorts to offset those ageing out of the cohorts.

Telugu

A new entry into the major language groups of NSW, the Indian language Telugu had 20,154 speakers at the 2021 Census, increasing by 7,698 people in five years (61% increase) and almost all Telugu speakers arrived in Australia since 2001.

Like many other Indian languages, Telugu speakers are heavily concentrated in the Western Sydney LHD, accounting for 59% of the total number in NSW. Beyond that they are dispersed, with 11.6% in Sydney LHD, and the rest in metropolitan Sydney, the Hunter and Illawarra regions. At the LGA level, more than half of all Telugu speakers are in the Blacktown, Parramatta and Cumberland LGAs.

Telugu has a similar age profile to many Indian languages, with a peak in the 25–44 age group (comprising 59% of total population) and 16% of speakers under 10-years-of-age. There are very few speakers in the other age groups.

For the cancer screening cohorts, this means very few Telugu speakers are in the breast and bowel screening groups, which take in people aged 50–74, with just 3.1% and 6.8% of population respectively. These percentages are among the lowest of any language group in NSW. Cervical screening is a larger group, because it includes females from the age of 25, it picks up the peak of the Telugu speaking population and includes 31.3% of the total (6,310 females, a similar proportion to that found across all languages). It is also a male dominated population (55% male) which reduces this somewhat.

Like most Indian languages, Telugu speakers have good English proficiency, with only 4.3% self-reporting difficulty with spoken English.

The Telugu speaking population is likely to grow in future with high migration from India. These will initially be in the peak migration age group of 25–40. It will be some time before this group ages into eligibility for the breast and bowel screening.

Russian

The 2021 Census recorded 20,060 Russian speakers in NSW, increasing by 1,297 people since 2016 (7% increase).

Most Russian speakers are found in the inner and eastern suburbs of Sydney, with South Eastern Sydney LHD (35.5% of total) comprising the largest share, followed by Northern Sydney (19.2%) and Sydney LHD (13.3%). Ninety-two percent of this population group is within metropolitan Sydney, with the largest numbers in the City of Sydney, Randwick and Bayside councils.

Russian speakers come from a wide range of countries, including 23% born in Australia, 33% from Russia, 14% from Ukraine, and a mix from China and the former Central Asian republics such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Russian speakers appear in two distinct generations. An elderly group over age 75, which is declining in number (now 9.7% of population), and most likely part of the post Second World War migration; and a younger group, including families, skilled migrants, and Australian-born Russian speakers aged 30–44 (28%).

Russian speakers are female-skewed at 57.2% female (only Thai, Japanese and Filipino languages have stronger female representations). This coupled with the age structure means that the breast and cervical cancer screening populations are over-represented compared to other language groups. The breast screening cohort makes up 15.3% of the Russian-speaking population (3,067 females), while cervical screening is 38.9% of Russian-speaking population (7,806 females). In contrast, the bowel screening cohort only makes up 26.1% of population, which is still significant with 5,243 people but lower than that found across all language groups as a percentage of population.

Russian speakers have a moderate rate of English proficiency, with 12.7% self-reporting poor or no English proficiency in 2021.

The Russian speaking population is likely to grow slightly into the future. While there is an elderly group continuing to age in place, there are enough new migrants coming in and children growing up speaking the language that it will continue to be a significant language group.

Japanese

The 2021 Census recorded 18,035 Japanese speakers in NSW, making up 0.2% of the total population. The number increased just slightly, by 716 people, or 4% since 2016.

The Japanese-speaking population in NSW is concentrated in the higher socio-economic areas of Sydney, particularly Northern Sydney LHD (40.9%) and South Eastern Sydney LHD (17.2%). At an LGA level, Willoughby Council has the largest number (1,789 people), followed by the City of Sydney and Northern Beaches, North Sydney and Ku-ring-gai councils. In Willoughby, Japanese is the most widely spoken language after English and the Chinese languages.

Japanese speakers are concentrated in two generational groups, 35–54-year-old parents, and children from 5–19-years-of-age. There are few over 60 but a sizeable population is aged in the early 50s. The bulk of the Japanese-speaking adult population is aged in the 40s, who will age into the bowel and breast screening age cohort of 50–74 years in the coming years.

Current cancer screening percentages for the Japanese-speaking population include breast screening (13.1% of the population) and bowel screening (21.5%), both lower in percentage terms than the average across all language groups. But cervical screening forms quite a high percentage, 40.6% or 7,327 females aged 25–74, due to the peak of population in the 25–49 age range, and one of the most heavily female-skewed populations (59% of Japanese speakers in NSW are female).

Japanese speakers had a moderately good rate of English proficiency, with 12.2% stating poor or no English proficiency in 2021.

Samoan

The 2021 Census recorded 17,301 Samoan speakers in NSW, a small increase of 757 speakers since 2016 (4.5%). Samoan is the most widely spoken language of the Pacific region spoken in NSW.

The Samoan language is concentrated in the South Western Sydney LHD (49% of total population) and Western Sydney LHD (28.5%). The Nepean Blue Mountains LHD had a further 8% of population; these three LHDs combined represent 86% of the Samoan-speaking population in NSW. At the LGA level, Blacktown, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Fairfield and Penrith had the highest rates of Samoan speakers. In regional NSW there is a small but significant community in Griffith.

The Samoan-speaking population has a large share of teenagers and people in aged in the 20s and early 30s. There is a smaller peak of population in the 40s but increasing numbers of people aged 50–59 years. There are very few over the age of 70.

Among the cancer screening cohorts, the sex ratio is close to 50-50. This, coupled with the age distribution means slightly lower percentages in the older-age screening cohorts. The breast screening eligible population made up 12.9% of Samoan speakers, while the bowel screening target group comprised 25.2% of Samoan speakers. Both of these are slightly lower than the average percentage across all language groups. The cervical cancer screening cohort of 25–74-year-old females made up a slightly higher percentage of population among Samoan speakers, 32.8%, due to the large share of females aged in the 20 and 30. There are many Samoan-speaking residents aged in the early 20s who will age into the cervical screening eligibility in coming years. With Samoan migration into Australia quite low, the ageing trend will kick in and increase the older cancer screening cohorts in future.

Samoan speakers have a relatively high rate of English proficiency. In 2021, 9.4% self-reported poor skills in spoken English.

Sinhalese

In the 2021 Census there were 13,570 Sinhalese speakers resident in NSW, an increase of 2,336 people or 21% since 2016. Sinhalese is primarily a language spoken in Sri Lanka, and the number of speakers, though small compared to some groups, has almost tripled in 20 years with increasing migration from that nation.

As with most Indian and Sri Lankan languages, Western Sydney LHD contains the largest share of Sinhalese speakers (47% of total in NSW). In this case however, a large minority also live in Northern Sydney LHD (18.4%), with the rest scattered in much smaller numbers around the state. At the LGA level, Blacktown has the largest number, followed by neighbouring The Hills Shire, Parramatta and Hornsby. This geographic distribution could best be described as north-western Sydney.

The Sinhalese-speaking population shows a peak in the age group of 30–49 years (39% of all population), which is similar but a little older than most other groups from the sub-continent. There are not large numbers of children, so most of these are not in family groups and may represent skilled migration. There are also significant numbers of Sinhalese speakers aged in their 50s and 60s but relatively few in older age brackets.

In terms of the cancer screening cohorts, the Sinhalese-speaking population has close to average rates of breast screening (13.5%) and bowel screening (27.0%) compared to all language groups, but a higher than average percentage of population in the cervical cancer screening cohort (36.3% of population being 25–74-year-old-females). The population is very close to 50-50 males and females. The bowel and breast screening cohorts can be expected to increase substantially in the next 10 years, as a large share of population is currently aged in the 40s and will age into the 50s in the coming decade.

Sinhalese speakers have one of the lowest rates of self-reported poor English proficiency in the state, with only 3.6% stating difficulty with English. Most groups from the Indian sub-continent show good English proficiency but this is particularly high, given that the population rate including English speakers is 4.5% with low proficiency. This means that targeted campaigns in the Sinhalese language may not be as effective as for other groups.

Polish

The 2021 Census counted 13,502 speakers of Polish resident in NSW, decreasing 622 people since 2016, and over 3,500 since 2001. The Polish language represents a wave of migration post Second World War, and like most of the European languages spoken in NSW, has been declining in recent years.

Like many well-established language groups in NSW, Polish speakers are spread across several areas, with most (86%) residing in Greater Sydney. The largest share is in South Western Sydney LHD (18.1%), closely followed by South Eastern Sydney LHD (17.1%) and Northern Sydney LHD (16.4%). At an LGA level, no single LGA has more than 1,000 Polish speakers, but the largest numbers are in Blacktown (923), Liverpool (751) and the City of Sydney (603).

The Polish-speaking population is an ageing community, with a high proportion of people aged in the 60s, who are likely the children of the migrants from the 1950s. Their parents are now aged in their 90s, while their children who still speak the Polish language are aged 30–44. With this older profile, the population is quite strongly female-skewed (56% female).

This means that the two female cancer screening cohorts (breast and cervical cancer) are over-represented in the population. The breast cancer screening cohort is 21.1% of the population (one of the largest shares of any language group in NSW) or 2,847 females. The cervical screening cohort comprises 41% of the population or over 5,500 females. These are both much higher than the average across all language groups. The bowel cancer screening cohort includes both sexes aged 50–74 and is also relatively large for this group, comprising 37.7% of population, compared to a population average across all language groups of 27.9%.

Polish speakers have moderately good English proficiency, with a relatively low rate of 8.7% self-reporting poor or no English proficiency. This is not one of the lowest rates among all languages but is relatively low. Those with difficulty speaking English are likely to be elderly, the original migrants.

With little migration from Poland in recent years, the Polish speaking population is likely to slowly decline.

Khmer

The Khmer language is mainly spoken in Cambodia. The 2021 Census revealed 12,578 Khmer speakers in NSW, increasing 984 people or 9% since the 2016 Census, and 50% in the past 20 years.

The Khmer-speaking population has one of the most concentrated distributions of any language group in NSW, with 82% living in the South Western Sydney LHD, and no significant numbers anywhere else. In fact, 54% (6,891 people) live in one LGA, Fairfield, with another 20% in neighbouring Liverpool. The next largest is 625 people in Campbelltown, with small but increasing numbers in Camden LGA. Khmer is the fifth most widely spoken language after English in Fairfield.

The age structure of the Khmer speaking population doesn't show generational groups but has significant numbers across all ages. There is a peak five-year age cohort of 35–39, which makes up 11.1% of the total population. It is a female-dominated population (55% female).

Among the cancer screening groups, 15.2% of the Khmer-speaking population is in the breast screening age cohort and 29.4% is in the bowel screening program cohort, 50–74-year-old persons. The moderately high numbers of people in these screening groups (just a little higher than the percentage average across all language groups) are likely the original migrants who arrived as children and young adults in the 1970s.

The cervical screening cohort of 25–74-year-old females takes in this group as well, but also younger females, and makes up 39.3% of the Khmer-speaking population, substantially higher than the 31.7% average across all language groups.

Khmer speakers also have one of the highest rates of poor English proficiency among the larger language groups. In 2021, 33.5% stated poor or zero English proficiency, which is higher than Vietnamese speakers. This, combined with the high proportion of population in the screening cohorts, means that the Khmer language is a clear example of a potential campaign in-language for any of the cancer screening programs, geographically focussed in South Western Sydney.

The Khmer language is likely to grow slowly, with a moderate amount of Cambodian migration, and ageing of the existing population over time.

Tongan

The 2021 Census recorded 11,725 Tongan speakers in NSW, and it is one of two Pacific languages in the top 40 of languages spoken in NSW. Since 2016, the Tongan-speaking population has increased by 14% or 1,439 speakers.

Tongan speakers show a similar geographic distribution to Samoan speakers, with 34.8% of Tongan speakers in Western Sydney LHD, and 30.2% in South Western Sydney LHD. There are also smaller numbers of Tongan-speaking residents throughout metropolitan Sydney, including Sydney LHD, South Eastern Sydney LHD and Northern Sydney LHD. About 10% of Tongan speakers live in regional NSW.

The Tongan-speaking population age structure shows large numbers in the 20–34 age range (27% of total population), with slightly greater numbers of children under 10 than the general NSW population, and a small peak among those in the 50s. This may be three generations of speakers, but the 20–34 age range may also be increased by students and employment-based migration. The Tongan-speaking population has slightly more males than females but is close to 50-50 split.

Among the cancer screening cohorts, Tongan speakers had a slightly smaller share in the two older cohorts, breast screening (12.8% of population) and bowel screening (24.8% of population), while the cervical screening cohort of 25–74-year-old females was exactly the same as the average across all language groups, at 31.7%. This comprised 3,722 Tongan-speaking females.

The Tongan speaking population had a moderately good level of English proficiency, with 10.6% (1,247 people) self-reporting difficulty with English.

The Tongan language is expected to remain stable or grow slowly in the future, with some continued migration, and family formation among those already in NSW. There is a moderate population in their 40s which means even if the population doesn't grow much, there will be increases in the bowel and breast screening age cohorts as the population ages in place.

Maltese

There were 10,377 Maltese speakers resident in NSW at the 2021 Census, a decline of 1,950 or 16% since the 2016 Census. In percentage terms this is the largest decline of any language in the top 40 languages spoken in NSW. Maltese has been declining for some time, reducing almost 6,000 people or 36% of population in the past 20 years.

This is consistent with many European language groups in NSW, which represent, mainly, post-Second World War migration.

The Maltese-speaking population is mostly in the western areas of Sydney, spread between Western Sydney LHD (34.3%), South Western Sydney LHD (20.1%) and Nepean Blue Mountains LHD (18.6%). There are smaller but significant numbers in the Illawarra, Central Coast and Hunter New England LHDs. At the LGA level, almost 20% of the population is in Blacktown, followed by Penrith, Cumberland, Fairfield and Hawkesbury LGAs.

The Maltese-speaking population is one of the oldest in NSW. Many of the European languages have an elderly age profile, but Maltese is particularly made up of elderly people. In 2021, 57% of the population was older than 65. There is little evidence of the language continuing into subsequent generations, so the population is declining as the older population die. Very few children or young people speak Maltese.

This has the effect of a large percentage of the population being eligible for cancer screening, particularly breast and bowel screening, which apply to people aged 50–74. The Maltese speaking population is about 53% female, due primarily to the age distribution (females have longer life expectancy). So, the breast screening cohort is much larger than the average across all language group, comprising 24.3% of Maltese speakers. The bowel screening cohort of all persons aged 50–74 has 45% of the Maltese-speaking population fall into this category, which is the largest percentage of all language groups in NSW. It includes 4,670 Maltese-speaking people, a similar number to the language groups that have two to three times more population. The cervical cancer screening group for 25–74-year-old females was close to the average across all language group at 32.7% of the Maltese-speaking population.

Maltese speakers have very good English proficiency, with only 7.2% stating difficulty with the English language.

It is expected the Maltese language will continue to decline in Australia, as there is minimal migration from Malta, which itself has a small population. The number of Maltese speakers eligible for cancer screening will decline, as many in this population group will soon age past 75 years.

Marathi

Marathi is an Indian language, predominantly from the state of Maharashtra in central India. It is a relatively new language in Australia, with the NSW population speaking it growing from approximately 1,000 people in 2001, to 9,753 in 2021, and increasing 3,784 speakers or 64% in five years from 2016.

Like most Indian languages, Marathi is primarily found in the western parts of Greater Sydney, with the Western Sydney LHD containing 45% of the state's total speakers, and another 21% in South Western Sydney LHD. In this case there is a significant minority in Northern Sydney as well (16%). Ninety-six percent of Marathi speakers are in Greater Sydney. At the LGA level, Blacktown, Parramatta and Campbelltown LGAs have the largest numbers.

Like most Indian populations, Marathi speakers have a large peak in age groups from 30–44 years, making up 41% of this population group. There are also many family groups, with children aged 0–14 making up 21% of the population. But there are very few Marathi speakers over the age of 50. The sex ratio is very close to 50-50.

Within the cancer screening age groups, Marathi speakers have a very small share of population in the breast screening (5.9%) and bowel screening (12.5%) cohorts, due to small numbers of people aged over 50. Because the population of Marathi speakers is quite small, this amounts to only about 1,200 eligible for the bowel screening program, and less than 600 for breast screening. However, there are many speakers aged in the 40s, so these groups are likely to increase significantly in number over the next 10 years, as the population ages. They may not increase in percentage terms if migration of younger people continues.

Like all the Indian languages, there is a very high rate of proficiency in English among Marathi speakers, with just 3.8% reporting difficulty with spoken English (below the total population percentage including English).

Dari

The Dari language is a dialect of Persian primarily spoken in Afghanistan. In 2021, the Census recorded 9,106 Dari speakers resident in NSW, a stable population since 2016 (decline of just 35 people). However, Dari speakers have increased substantially since 2006 when the language was first recorded separately from Persian.

Dari speakers in NSW are concentrated in Western Sydney LHD, with 72% of the state's Dari-speaking population. A further 13% is in South Western Sydney LHD, and just a few in other areas. At the LGA level, Cumberland Council has 3,466 Dari speakers or 38% of the state's total. Blacktown and Parramatta has mostly the rest of this population group.

Dari speakers are generally young, but with some in the older age groups. The 20–39 age range had the largest share with 39% of Dari speakers. There was 23% of the population aged under 15 counted in 2021 Census. It is a slightly male-skewed population (51% male).

Among the cancer screening age groups, the young age structure of Dari speakers means that breast screening (9.1%) and bowel (17.6%) screening groups are smaller than the average percentage across all language groups. The cervical screening program includes 25–74-year-old females which takes in the peak of Dari speakers' age range, so it includes 29.3% of this population group, about 3,300 females. This is slightly lower than the average percentage across all language groups. But with the large number of females currently aged under 25 ageing in place, they will soon increase the numbers eligible for cervical screening. The breast and bowel screening cohorts of ages 50–74 will take a while to increase as most Dari speakers in NSW are currently under age 40.

Dari speakers have a relatively high rate of poor English proficiency, with 21.9% self-reporting that they spoke English not well or not at all in 2021. So, despite lower percentages in the screening cohorts, an in-language campaign particularly for cervical screening could be effective for this group, particularly geographically targeted in the Cumberland City Council area.

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