



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Economics,
Industry and Recreation

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy

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Submission by: ACT MULTICULTURAL COUNCIL

Submission to: **the Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy**

To: Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, ACT Legislative Assembly

From: ACT Multicultural Council

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1. About the ACT Multicultural Council

The ACT Multicultural Council (ACTMC) is a peak body representing a wide range of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in the ACT and region. ACTMC works to promote social cohesion, cultural expression, and equitable access to services and opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds, including newly arrived migrants, refugees, international students, and long-standing multicultural communities.

Our interest in this inquiry arises because the night-time economy is a critical arena in which inclusion, safety, cultural expression and economic opportunity intersect for multicultural communities.

2. Overview and Key Messages

ACTMC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy and strongly supports the ACT Government's vision of a vibrant, safe and inclusive city after dark.

Our key messages are:

- A well-designed night-time economy can promote social cohesion, showcase cultural diversity and generate inclusive economic opportunities for CALD communities.
- Safety, transport, and regulatory settings currently limit full participation of many multicultural communities, especially women, older people, youth, and those living in outer suburbs.
- There is significant untapped potential in multicultural food, music, arts, markets and festivals to diversify Canberra's night-time offer beyond alcohol-centred venues.
- Policies and programs should be co-designed with multicultural communities, including community organisations and small businesses, to ensure accessibility, cultural safety and economic benefit.

3. Community Safety and Wellbeing at Night

Many people in multicultural communities are cautious about participating in night-time activities due to safety concerns, past experiences of discrimination, and limited knowledge of local areas and services.

Key issues raised with ACTMC include:

- Perceptions of alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour in certain night-time precincts, which can discourage families, women, and older community members from attending night-time events.
- Experiences of racial vilification or discriminatory treatment in and around some venues, including at entry points or when seeking assistance.
- Limited lighting, poor passive surveillance and “dead” spaces around transport hubs and carparks in some areas, which especially affect women and those who finish work late.

ACTMC recommends:

1. **Strengthen visible, community-oriented safety measures** in key precincts (including Civic, town centres and selected local centres), such as better lighting, CCTV where appropriate, and well-trained security and police with cultural competence and anti-racism training.
2. **Promote alcohol-diverse and family-friendly precincts and events**, including options where alcohol is secondary or absent, to encourage participation by families, elders, faith-based groups and youth from CALD communities.
3. **Support anti-racism and cultural safety initiatives** in night-time venues and precinct management, including training for hospitality, retail and security staff and public campaigns that clearly signal zero tolerance for racism and harassment.

4. Health, Inclusion and Social Cohesion

A diverse and welcoming night-time economy can contribute positively to mental health, social connection and a sense of belonging for multicultural communities. Conversely, exclusion or lack of culturally appropriate spaces can reinforce isolation.

Key points:

- Many CALD communities value evening and late-night socialising, especially around food, religious and cultural celebrations, and community gatherings.
- Opportunities for inter-cultural exchange at night—through markets, performances and festivals—can build understanding and cohesion across communities.
- International students, temporary migrants and shift-workers in multicultural communities often rely on night-time services for food, transport, social connection and remittance or support services.

ACTMC recommends:

4. **Integrate multicultural health and wellbeing perspectives** into night-time planning, including consultation with community health providers and multicultural services on how night-time design and programming can support mental health and reduce isolation.
5. **Ensure accessibility and affordability** of night-time activities for low-income and newly arrived communities, including free or low-cost events, and support for community-run initiatives in local centres.
6. **Support faith- and culture-sensitive programming**, including consideration of key religious and cultural calendars (e.g. Ramadan, major cultural new year celebrations) in planning late-night transport and events.

5. Economic Opportunities for Multicultural Communities

Multicultural communities contribute significantly to Canberra's hospitality, retail, creative and service sectors, yet face barriers to fully participating in and benefiting from the night-time economy.

Key barriers include:

- Complex regulatory requirements and compliance costs that are difficult for small, family-run or newly established multicultural businesses to navigate.
- Limited access to affordable premises in well-located precincts, particularly for start-ups and community enterprises that operate part-time or seasonally.
- Difficulty in accessing information, grants and support programs due to language, digital literacy or lack of established networks.

ACTMC recommends:

7. **Targeted business support for multicultural operators**, including translated guidance, mentoring and “one-stop” advisory services on licensing, planning and compliance for night-time activities.

8. **Facilitate flexible, low-cost access to space**, such as short-term or pop-up licences for markets, food stalls, performance spaces and community events in town and group centres.

9. **Incorporate multicultural enterprises into night-time economic development initiatives**, including promotional campaigns, “night markets,” late-night shopping or dining programs, and precinct-based events.

10. **Collect and report data on multicultural business participation**, including the number and type of CALD-owned or operated businesses in night-time precincts, to inform policy and measure progress.

6. Cultural Expression, Arts and Events

Canberra's cultural diversity is a key strength that can significantly enrich the night-time economy. Many communities already organise cultural events, performances and festivals, but often face limitations related to permits, costs, noise restrictions and access to suitable venues.

ACTMC recommends:

11. **Embed multicultural arts and culture** as a core pillar of night-time economy planning, with dedicated funding streams or grant categories for multicultural night-time events.

12. **Streamline approvals and reduce costs** for community-led night-time events, including outdoor performances, night markets and cultural festivals, while maintaining appropriate safety and amenity standards.

13. **Encourage partnerships between venues and multicultural artists and organisations**, for example through venue incentives to program multicultural performances, language-specific comedy or film nights, and cross-cultural collaborations.

14. **Promote diverse marketing and communication**, ensuring that night-time events and precincts are advertised through multicultural media, community networks and in multiple languages where appropriate.

7. Transport, Access and Urban Design

Safe, reliable and affordable transport is essential for equitable participation in the night-time economy, especially for those living in outer suburbs, shift-workers, and people who do not drive.

Key issues for multicultural communities include:

- Limited late-night public transport frequency, particularly on weekends and in corridors serving newer suburbs.
- Concerns about safety at bus stops and interchanges at night.
- The cost of rideshare or taxis, especially for low-income households and larger families.

ACTMC recommends:

15. **Improve late-night public transport** in key corridors and on event nights, including clear and multilingual information on services.

16. **Enhance safety and amenity at transport hubs** through lighting, staff presence, wayfinding and design that supports passive surveillance.

17. **Consider pilot schemes** such as subsidised late-night transport for major cultural events or partnerships with community organisations to provide safe transport options for vulnerable groups.

8. Governance, Engagement and Co-Design

For the night-time economy to be genuinely inclusive, multicultural communities must be involved in planning, decision-making and ongoing governance.

ACTMC recommends:

18. **Establish a structured mechanism for ongoing engagement** with multicultural communities on night-time economy policy and implementation, such as a multicultural advisory panel linked to relevant government and precinct bodies.

19. **Ensure representation of multicultural voices** on any night-time economy advisory groups, precinct boards or business associations receiving government support.

20. **Use co-design processes** for major initiatives, precinct strategies and reforms that affect night-time trading, public space use and regulation, with specific engagement strategies for women, youth and emerging communities.

9. Conclusion

The ACT Multicultural Council believes that a safe, inclusive and vibrant night-time economy is essential to Canberra's social, cultural and economic future. Multicultural communities bring substantial strengths—entrepreneurship, creativity, diverse cultural practices and strong community networks—that can help realise this vision if appropriately supported.

We welcome the Committee's focus on Canberra's night-time economy and would be pleased to participate in further consultations, roundtables or public hearings, and to support outreach to multicultural communities as the inquiry progresses.

ACT Multicultural Council (ACTMC)