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Recreation in North Melbourne ENGAGEMENT ANALYSIS

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Prepared by Global Research Ltd.

For



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Executive summary

Introduction

The City of Melbourne (CoM) is looking at the recreation services in North Melbourne to ensure they meet the community's needs, both now and in the future.

To help with this, CoM sought feedback on the recreation offering in North Melbourne and the accessibility of the programs, services, and facilities at North Melbourne Community Centre (NMCC) in Bunle Street and North Melbourne Recreation Centre (NMRC) in Arden Street.

The aim of this community engagement was to:

- > Seek community feedback on current use, barriers and gaps in recreation services at NMCC.
- > Communicate the rationale around the proposal to relocate the NMCC gym to the NMRC.
- > Identify any support required for current users to transition from NMCC to NMRC.
- > To seek feedback on current and future recreation needs and services in North Melbourne, with a focus on the North Melbourne Community Centre and North Melbourne Recreation Centre.

This report contains analysis and presents findings from the public feedback received.

1. Key themes

- > Both centres are deeply valued by the North Melbourne community – especially the pool at NMRC, and the gyms at both centres – but both are considered in need of an upgrade, particularly regarding classes, equipment, and the facility itself.
- > Almost half – 48% of respondents – stated there were facilities and services (at either centre) they wanted to use but didn't. This emphasizes that recreational facilities are important to the North Melbourne Community, but that current options are not fully meeting people's needs.
- > Small gym and group fitness spaces and out-of-date facilities equipment (at both centres, but especially at NMRC which has a larger membership base) resulting in crowding, lines for equipment, and an unappealing experience for users.
- > Some services are considered unsuitable for specific demographics, for example, lack of women-only sessions at the pool or women-only fitness sessions.
- > More services aimed at children and young people sought. Other groups were also raised as in need of more specific programmes, such as older people, CALD groups, and those with injuries or disabilities.
- > A desire to see the seasonal pool at NMRC become an all-year-round facility with the inclusion of warm water facilities.
- > Affordability, while not a prominent theme in written comments, appeared frequently when respondents were asked to select what would encourage use. This was especially the case for non-NMRC users, with the top 6 factors to encourage people to use the NMRC all involving free or more affordable access of some type.

2. Key findings

2.1. North Melbourne Community Centre

- > The most-used facility at the NMCC (answered by 220 respondents) over the last 12 months was the gym, with 40% of respondents stating they have used this. The indoor courts had been used by 23% of respondents, while group fitness classes had been used by 19%.

- > The gym was the most valued offering at NMCC, with half (50%) of the 220 who answered this question stating they value this most. This was followed by group fitness classes (chosen by 28% of respondents) and the indoor basketball court (26%).
- > For those who **do not** use the NMCC (67 respondents), the two options people selected as most likely to encourage use were a free tour of the facilities (28%) or free access to the bookable spaces (25%).
- > Written comments were not extensive. Several people identified ways the NMCC facilities needed to improve, such as general upgrades to the building and equipment, while a small number of comments were made praising it as a valuable community resource.
- > NMCC was deemed the more community-focused and welcoming of the two centres and was valued for this reason.

2.2. North Melbourne Recreation Centre

- > The most-used facilities at the NMRC over the last 12 months (out of 212 respondents) were the pool (32%), followed by the gym (27%) and the group fitness classes (21%).
- > For the 82 respondents who **do not** use the NMRC, free access to the pool was the most commonly chosen option which would encourage use (selected by 27% of respondents). This was followed by more affordable memberships (22%), a free tour of the facilities (18%), a free session with a personal trainer (12%), free trial group fitness classes (11%), and free access to the court (10%).
- > In written answers, the most common problem at NMRC (with 20 comments) was an inadequate selection of classes, with people generally wanting a larger selection of classes available, at convenient times.
- > The NMRC was criticised as being too small, resulting in it being too crowded and people having to wait to use equipment. This, combined with poor quality or outdated equipment, was felt to create an unappealing experience for users. Moreover, a small number of people noted that it was more expensive than the NMCC.
- > NMRC was praised for its pool, though respondents suggested various ways to enhance its use – primarily making it warmer or covered to support winter use, as well as offering women-only sessions.

2.3. Barriers to use

- > Sixty (60) comments which did not specify a facility named (in relatively similar numbers) issues with the number of convenient classes; personal reasons (i.e. time pressure); the need for women's-only sessions (both for fitness and pool); being unsure of what's available; a crowded, unwelcoming or poorly equipped gym; and price.
- > Thirty-one (31) comments discussed NMRC and the pool, noting that the pool's unsuitability for use in cold weather was a barrier, as was the lack of women's-only swim times; that access is difficult (due to isolated surroundings or a more intangible sense that it is unwelcoming); lack of space and poor equipment; or the diminished class offering.
- > Fifteen (15) comments named barriers to use of NMCC, including the need for the building and equipment to be upgraded, longer opening hours, and more awareness of programmes.
- > When asked to select options they felt would encourage use of the facilities, respondents could also choose to share written suggestions. Improving programs and offerings, and increasing awareness of these; creating a more welcoming and safe space for different groups including women and those who speak languages other than English; extending opening hours; and improving affordability were all suggestions offered to encourage greater use of the facilities.
 - o Thirty percent of respondents (of 67) indicated that none of the options available in the survey were likely to encourage them to use the facilities at NMCC.
 - o A third of respondents (of 82) indicated that none of the options available in the survey were likely to encourage them to use the facilities at NMRC.

- > While numbers of written comments regarding personal barriers were small, several respondents identified particular barriers, many of which were linked to convenience (or lack thereof), such as living too far away, or time pressure due to children or work.

2.4. More demographic-specific services

- > People wanted more recreation services and programmes, especially those catering to specific demographics (like children/youth or women). These comments often did not identify a specific facility, appearing to call more generally for these services to be provided in North Melbourne.
 - o 28 comments discussed the need for more programmes aimed at children and young people. Suggested programmes encompassed physical recreation as well as others like arts, cooking, and homework clubs.
 - o There was also support (in 23 comments) for dedicated sessions and programmes for women, such as female-only times at the gym, and female-only swimming sessions. Several other comments across other questions identified the lack of women-only spaces as a barrier to using fitness facilities (without specifying a venue) or the pool.
 - o Other groups, such as older people, were also raised as in need of more specific programmes, as were CALD groups, and those with injuries or disabilities.

2.5. Gym or fitness classes

- > There were 41 comments made about the need for more gym and fitness classes at the NMCC or in the surrounding areas, with a few of these referring specifically to the NMRC. This was envisioned as bigger and better gyms, and more classes. In a separate question, 20 comments mentioned classes and timetabling at the NMRC, expressing a preference for a greater range of classes held at convenient times.

2.6. Swimming facilities

- > Across multiple questions, the importance of a pool to the North Melbourne community was clear.
- > The NMRC facility that received the most praise was the pool, though people suggested ways to extend use (longer opening hours, more activities and programs for children, more usable in winter), and several people raised the pool's lack of heating/cover as a flaw.
- > The value of swimming was echoed in comments requesting a pool be added to the NMCC or surrounding areas (the single most requested new facility).

2.7. Affordability

- > While not a major theme in written comments, offering free access, free tours of the facilities, or free trials was prominent when respondents could select options that would encourage them to use the NMRC or NMCC.
- > In particular, affordability was the top concern for non-NMRC user respondents when stating what would encourage them to use that facility; the top six factors to encourage people to use the NMRC all involved free or more affordable access of some description.

2.8. Sports courts

- > More court facilities were deemed to be needed in North Melbourne, with basketball and netball frequently mentioned, as well as various other sports.

3. Snapshot of respondents:

- > 223 respondents completed the online survey, and 29 participants took part in discussion groups to give feedback on the NMCC and the NMRC.
- > The majority of respondents (86%) were residents of North Melbourne; over half of respondents (51%) were living in rented accommodation (either social housing or private rentals), and just over a quarter (27%) were paying a mortgage.
- > Just over half of respondents (56%) stated they were female, and 40% stated they were male. Three percent (3%) preferred not to say.
- > Around half (48%) of respondents were aged under 40, and the largest group to participate were aged 35-39 (18%).
- > A third of respondents (32%) stated they speak a language other than English at home; of these, the largest group spoke Somali (17%), followed by Arabic (7%).

Project background

Background

City of Melbourne is looking at the recreation services in North Melbourne to ensure they meet the different needs of the community, both now and in the future.

Working with our partners the YMCA, we recently planned to amalgamate the gymnasium and group fitness programs and services between NMCC and NMRC, and transition members to NMRC. The planned change for 30th June 2022 was communicated to regular users of the services in May. This decision raised questions from the local community about the need for consultation before decisions are made. A decision was made by both parties to pause the planned changes and undertake a community engagement process to better understand the needs of the community. The information received from the consultation process will also inform a larger project regarding the future of the NMCC and how it best services the community into the future.

NMCC has a range of services including a gymnasium, multipurpose room, games room, community hall and indoor and outdoor sport courts. The types of programs and services offered include personal training, group fitness classes, playgroups, youth programs, outdoor sports and room hire.

NMRC is an aquatic (outdoor seasonal pool) and recreation centre with gymnasium, indoor sports court, and bookable spaces. The programs offered include personal training, group fitness classes, swimming lessons and indoor sports.

Consultation was undertaken between 25 July and 4 September 2022.

Engagement reach

A range of channels were used in this engagement process to reach members of the community.

The primary mode of engagement was the Participate Melbourne website, where respondents could answer an online survey. Neighbourhood Consultation Pop-ups – where Council staff were available to answer questions or assist people to complete the survey or answer questions – were held to encourage and support community members to engage with the Participate Melbourne survey.

Five pop ups were held at NMCC and one was held in the lobby of the public housing estate at 33 Alfred Street, North Melbourne.

Two discussion groups were also held with community members, and people could send in their feedback via email. At discussion groups, Council staff facilitated a discussion with a group of community members

Below is a breakdown of the responses received throughout this engagement:

- > **Online survey:** 223 respondents
- > **Email submissions:** 2 emails
- > **Neighbourhood consultation pop-ups:** 6 sessions. Participant numbers were in the vicinity of 110
- > **2 informal discussion groups:** 29 participants

Methodology

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data gathered from the free-text boxes in the Participate Melbourne survey, email submissions and notes from discussion groups was entered into NVivo qualitative analysis software. Each comment was read and coded into relevant themes and topics by Global Research analysts.

The identified themes and topics have been discussed in order of most- to least-frequently mentioned under each question (as asked in the surveys).

Comments from respondents have been included in this report verbatim. However, obvious spelling or grammatical errors have been amended for clarity.

Feedback collected at discussion groups and pop ups or through email submissions has been read and summarised separately to the online survey responses.

To provide a clear and consistent indication of the number of comments received on each topic, the following key was used to describe the relative number of comments on each topic:

Key for comment numbers	
3 comments	A few
4-7 comments	A small number
8-14 comments	Several
15-24 comments	A moderate number
25-49 comments	A considerable number
50-74 comments	A substantial number
75-99 comments	A sizeable number
100-149 comments	A large number

Quantitative analysis

Frequency analysis was completed on responses to all quantitative questions and results are presented as charts, along with key findings.

Note: decimal points are rounded and therefore percentages do not always add exactly to 100.

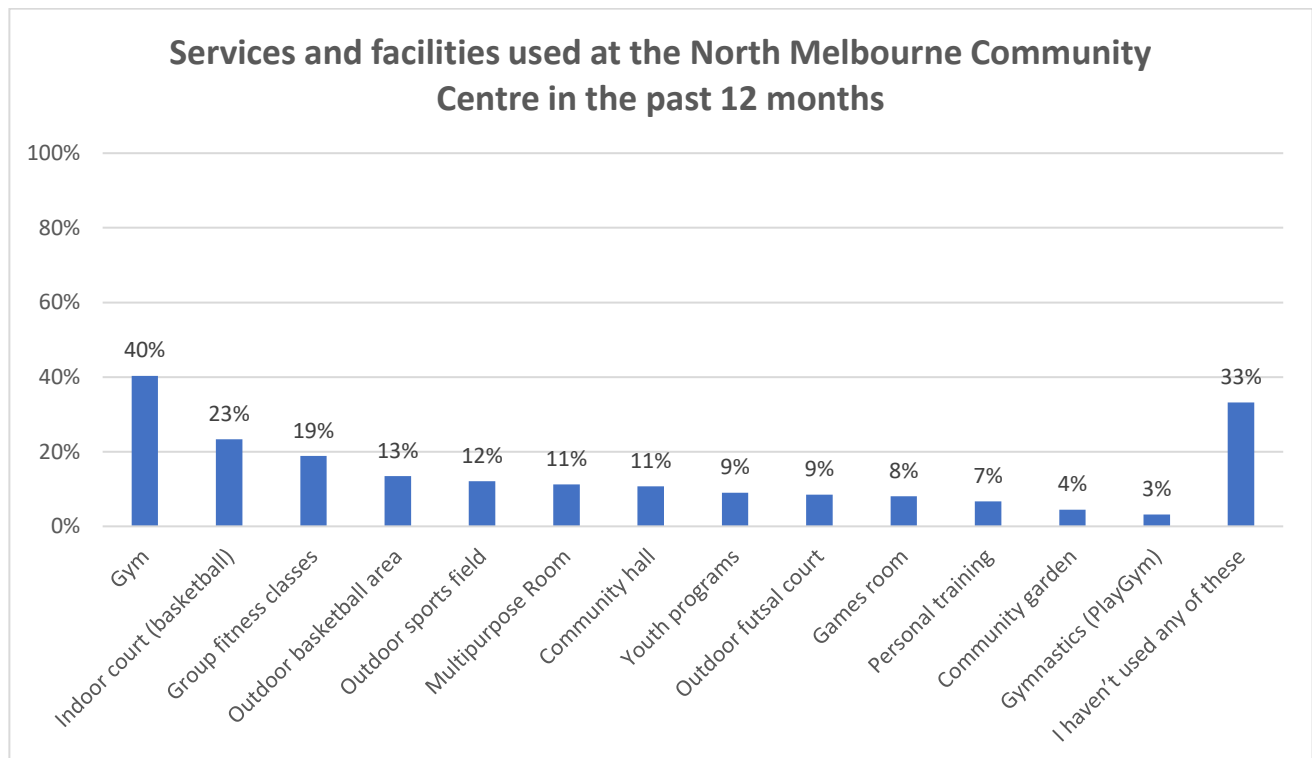
Survey results

Services and facilities used at the North Melbourne Community Centre

Respondents were asked: The North Melbourne Community Centre on Buncl Street is a City of Melbourne facility. A number of organisations provide programs and services for the local community from this centre, including the YMCA and The Huddle. *Which of the following recreation services and facilities at North Melbourne Community Centre have you used in the last year?*

Note that respondents could select more than one option.

220 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

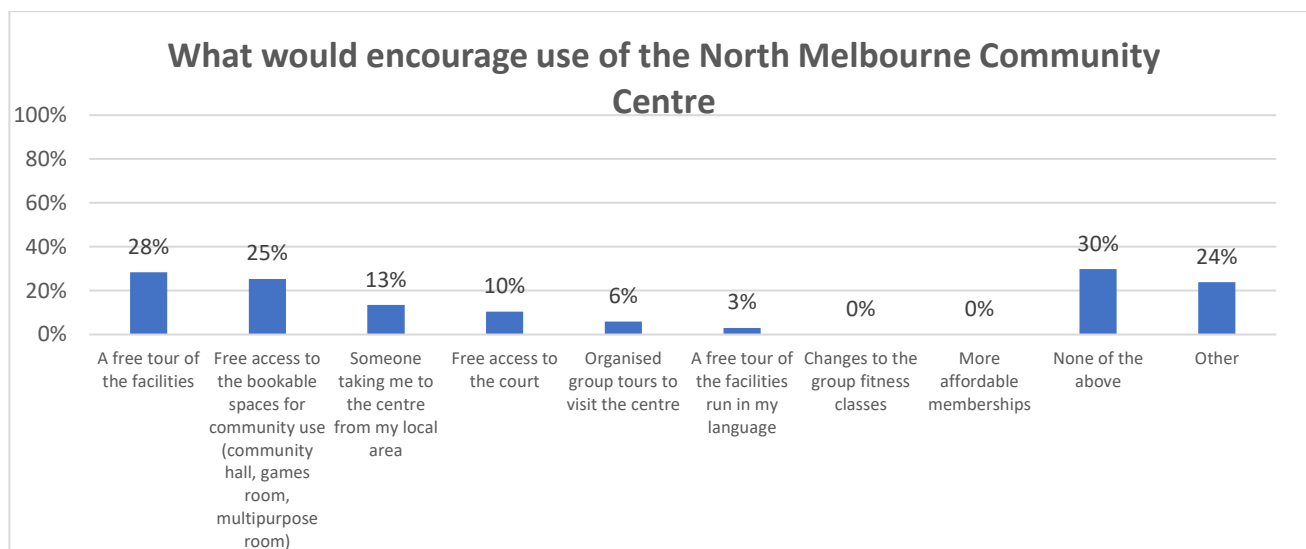
- > The most frequently used facility in the NMCC over the past 12 months was the gym, which was used by 40% of respondents during that period.
- > The indoor basketball court was the second most commonly used facility, used by 23% of respondents, followed by group fitness classes (19%).
- > A third of respondents noted that they had not used any of the services or facilities listed in the question.

What would encourage people to use the North Melbourne Community Centre

Respondents were asked: *If you have never used the North Melbourne Community Centre, or not recently, which of the following would most likely encourage you to use the centre?*

Note that respondents could select more than one option.

67 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

- > No single initiative was overwhelmingly supported as likely to encourage use.
- > A free tour of facilities to familiarise people with the surroundings was the most often selected aspect that was likely to encourage use (28%).
- > One quarter (25%) felt that free access to bookable spaces would encourage them.
- > Thirty percent selected that none of the options would encourage them, while just under a quarter selected other.

'Other' responses included: Two respondents noted they had no awareness that classes/activities take place there and that longer opening hours would attract them to use the centre, and one respondent each noted: more women's and girls' activities; a membership which allows NMRC users to also access the NMCC facilities; language assistance; increased affordability; changes to group fitness classes; that NMRC is closer; and that a lack of availability of services/lack of timetabling that suits was an aspect that prevented use. Lastly, one person noted:

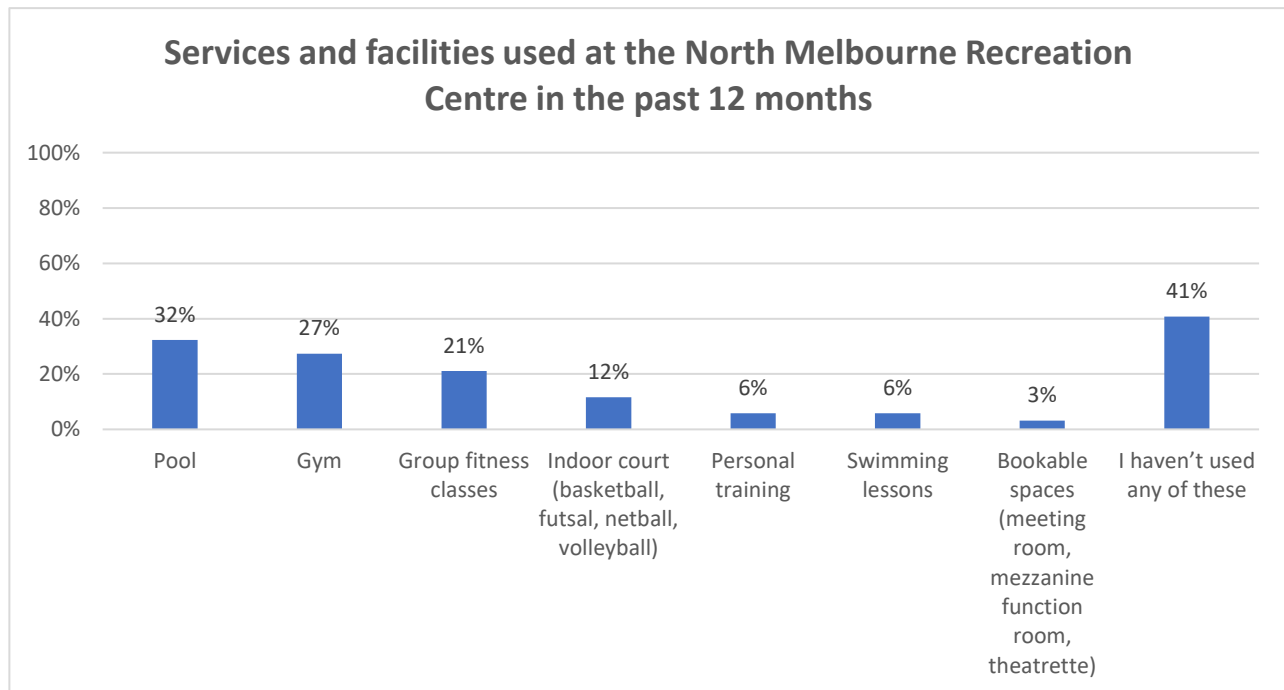
Including the group fitness activities in the Melbourne Active App. We got used to this way to see the activities available.

Services and facilities used at the North Melbourne Recreation Centre

Respondents were asked: Which of the following recreation services and facilities at North Melbourne Recreation Centre have you used in the last year?

Note that respondents could select more than one option.

212 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

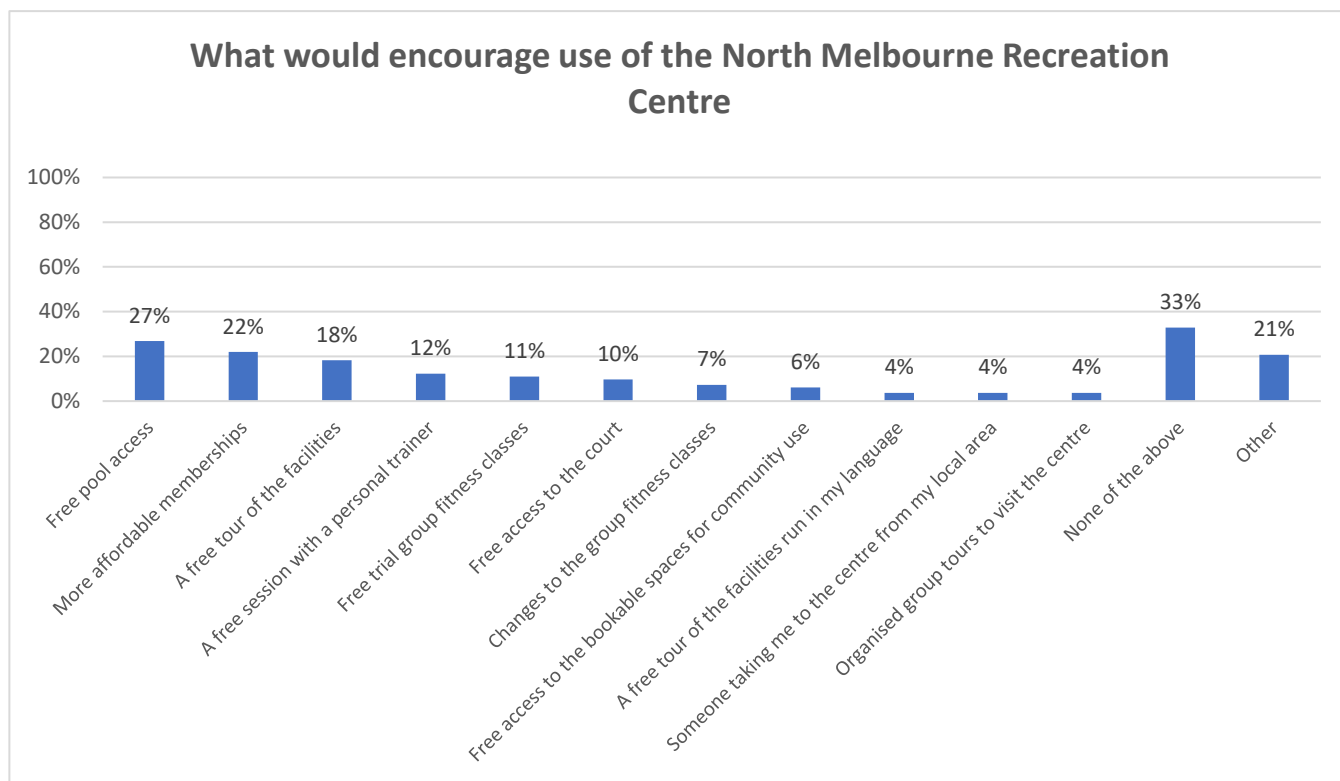
- > The services and facilities that were most used in the previous year were the pool (used by 32% of respondents), and the gym (used by 27%).
- > Over a third of respondents (41%) had not used any of the listed services and facilities at NMRC.
- > One-fifth of respondents (21%) reported they had used the group fitness classes.
- > Indoor courts (e.g., for basketball, futsal, netball, or volleyball) had been used by 12%.
- > Personal training and swimming lessons had been accessed by 6% each.

What would encourage people to use the North Melbourne Recreation Centre

Respondents were asked: *If you have never used the North Melbourne Recreation Centre (NMRC), or not recently, which of the following would most likely encourage you to use the centre?*

Note that respondents could select more than one option.

82 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

- > Affordability was the top concern for non-NMRC user respondents when stating what would encourage them to use that facility; the top 6 factors to encourage people to use the NMRC all involved free or more affordable access of some description.
- > A third of respondents (33%) stated that none of the options would encourage them to use the NMRC.
- > Free pool access and more affordable memberships were selected by 27% and 22% of non-NMRC user respondents respectively.
- > Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents stated that a free tour of the facilities would encourage their use.
- > The fourth most popular aspect that would encourage use was being offered a free session with a personal trainer.
- > **'Other' responses included:** three respondents felt NMRC was too small or "cramped", two stated they would use it if there were an indoor pool; and one person each stated the following: more programs generally; increased awareness of what is offered; guidance and support; free basketball; longer opening hours; "price"; more equipment; more welcoming; self-motivation; more booking times available; and more options for children.

What respondents said: Further comments

Respondents were asked: *Do you have any further comments?*

Respondents provided their thoughts in a free-text box. These comments have been analysed below. 116 respondents answered this question.

NMRC issues

86 comments

Classes and timetabling (20)

The most common response when respondents were asked for further comments was about timetabling – a moderate number of respondents cited specific classes that have been discontinued or timetabling issues that have resulted in people reducing their attendance.

The following aspects were noted: morning spin classes; daytime yoga or Pilates; Tuesday lunch-time classes; reformer Pilates classes; and after-work classes.

Would like a bigger range of classes and classes such as circuit and pump available in the evenings.

Similarly, reduced number of class times and limited opening hours have impacted on people's use of the NMRC.

The number & variety of classes has dramatically decreased and is no longer value for money.

The number of group fitness classes available is smaller than before July 2022.

Small or dated spaces (14)

Several respondents noted that the NMRC is "too small and congested", "way too small", and that it needs updating. The NMCC gym, by comparison, was described as larger, and able to accommodate more people.

*Worse set-up than any other gym at NMRC and much more expensive than other gyms.
Access to equipment and equipment utilised in the space is difficult.*

Gym at NMRC is too small. Happy to use group fitness at NMRC but not gym.

I cancelled my membership there as it is a small space for the number of members it has.

A few respondents simply stated that the NMRC needs to be larger, one of which stated:

Best use is to expand North Melbourne Football Club facilities.

Costs of access (11)

Of the several respondents whose 'further comments' about the use/disuse of NMRC or the NMCC were about costs, half expressed concern about the difference in price to access NMRC versus the NMCC. One person queried whether membership costs will increase "as a result of the move" and others generally objected to price increases.

The cost of a membership to the North Melbourne Recreation Centre is over 2.5x what I pay to attend the facilities at the North Melbourne Community Centre. I personally will not consider moving gyms for the prices currently charged despite the additional facilities which do not appeal to me as much.

A small number of respondents supported free access for all or certain groups (such as "training for kids", free membership, or free for groups such as vulnerable seniors), while one person stated that "free free free is no good".

Lastly one person was concerned that “this is a cost-driven change” but did not expand on their comment.

Quality of facilities or equipment (8)

Several respondents wanted to see more or better equipment at the NMRC gym. It was described as “under resourced”, not up to standard, in need of “more free weights”, “dusty”, and in need of better equipment generally.

The size & equipment doesn't work.

NMRC facilities aren't up to standard. They need more free weights and high-quality equipment.

One person felt that bookable rooms should have hot running water and better insulation or heating.

Too crowded (7)

The small size of the gym coupled with the number of people who use it was said to create problems for users: these included that it is crowded with people, that users must queue for use of equipment, and that the inadequate space between machines makes it feel congested.

That means equipment time is hard to get during a session (which is bad enough when you're on a tight schedule), but it also means the risk of COVID-19 is not managed well at all in this facility.

One respondent reported that the NMRC is “oversubscribed”, while another stated that it is “impossible to get a machine” during peak times.

Management and staffing (7)

A small number of respondents provided feedback about council’s decision to change the management model at the North Melbourne Recreation Centre and the service levels provided under the new operator. This feedback has been noted.

No knowledge of programs available (4)

A small number of respondents remarked that they were not aware of the extent of programs offered at NMRC, making comments such as “I am new to the area” and “more information about what’s available”.

NMRC atmosphere (4)

NMRC was said to have a distinct atmosphere predicated on its association with the North Melbourne Football Club. It was labelled “not community friendly” by one person, who linked this with the “corporatised football club environment”. Others noted similarly that it had “more of a ‘pump ‘em up’ atmosphere”, as opposed to the community offering at the NMCC.

The AFL club is not community minded.

The NMRC gym is a different model to the NMCC gym which is a community offering.

Difficult to book spaces (3)

Using bookable spaces at NMRC was described by three people as difficult or involving complex or unnecessary processes (such as the ‘working with children check’ for using a bookable room with only adults present). Booking the basketball spaces were also deemed difficult owing to demand.

I have attended the theatre at the main building but understand that this is controlled by the football club and is difficult to book. In summary there appear to be insufficient spaces which the community can use at the NMRC.

Other (1)

One person stated that they have not been using NMRC facilities much lately due to health concerns related to COVID.

NMRC: positive or aspirational comments

33 comments

Swimming (20)

A moderate number of comments were made about the swimming facilities at NMRC – these were either in the context of statements about the way in which respondents use the pool, or their aspirations for how the swimming facility might be used in future.

Comments such as “love the outdoor pool in summer”, and “North Melbourne pool is FANTASTIC” were made alongside friendly requests for longer opening hours and greater offerings for children (such as lessons, activities, or holiday programs).

Would love to have access for longer during the year with heating. Any chance of extending the pool length???

A small number of requests were made in this section about the pool being open all year around, perhaps with heating to ensure comfort for users.

Positive comments about NMRC (7)

A small number of respondents made positive general comments about the NMRC along the lines of “great space”, “great environment to maintain my fitness”, and “large rooms available”.

As a resident of this area, I enjoy coming here and using the facilities and my community uses the soccer field very often so what changes will be made are going to affect the community, the residents and me?

Zumba classes were appreciated by a couple of respondents.

Activities for children (6)

Homework clubs, children’s basketball activities, and space for children were supported by a small number of respondents. Additional suggestions were a skate park, and greater availability of swimming lessons. The following comment is from a respondent keen to see more children’s physical activities available locally:

There should be more options at COM facilities for kids. There are lots of kids living in COM, but families generally need to travel to other municipalities for kids’ activities. COM has in the past undertaken studies [on the] lack of physical activity of kids in the municipality, but there are not many things on offer at COM facilities. I suggest the Sport and Rec department at COM speaks more to families.

NMCC

13 comments

Issues with the NMCC (7)

A small number of criticisms were levelled at the NMCC; these were largely around the quality of the facilities and equipment with such comments as “centre needs repair”, “leaky roofs”, “dirty”, and one person said that, while a netball court was advertised, there were no netball rings.

Additionally, one comment included several points for improvements, these were around the small size of various facilities (futsal court, community hall, indoor basketball area, and the games room), and the lack of personal trainers and equipment in the gym.

Positive comments about NMCC (5)

A small number of respondents expressed general support for the NMCC, stating it is “wonderful for the community”, that the availability of the hall has been “amazing” for the Kyudo martial arts group, that its closure would be “a great loss”, and comments urging that the NMCC gym not be closed down or merged. One person argued that with a small amount of effort and funds to rejuvenate the NMCC, it would once again be a valuable asset for the community. They went on to state:

It's not acceptable to tout issues of social change as a means of persuasion when all that really matters is that local people have a safe, accessible environment to work out and get fit.

Other (1)

One person stated simply that they have not used the NMCC since the COVID-19 pandemic limited their use of the facility.

Other comments

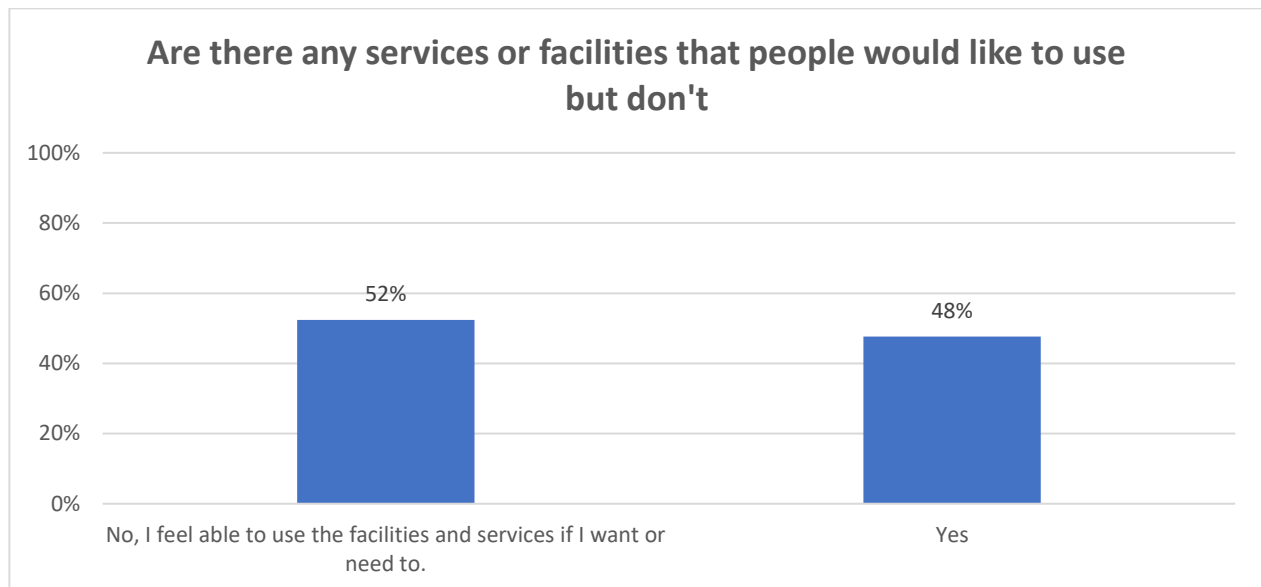
10 comments

Remaining comments were varied and often did not specifically pertain to one centre or the other. A few respondents stated they did not use the gym (e.g., “used to use gym but hurt knee”), and a few others offered the name of a different gym or facility that they use (e.g., “the gym in Kensington”), while others reiterated earlier responses.

Facilities and services people would like to use but don't

Respondents were asked: *Are there any facilities and services at the North Melbourne Community Centre or the North Melbourne Recreation Centre you'd like to use, but don't?*

210 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

- > Just over half of respondents (52%) stated they felt able to use the facilities and services they wanted to or needed to.
- > Just under half (48%) stated there were facilities and services they wanted to use but didn't. This represents a large proportion of respondents who are not accessing NMRC and NMCC services.

What respondents said: What stops you from using the facilities or services at either of the centres?

Respondents were asked: *What stops you from using the facilities or services at either of the centres?*

Respondents provided their thoughts in a free-text box. These comments have been analysed below.

Note: it was not always clear which facility respondents were discussing.

92 respondents answered this question.

Comments about either, or an unnamed centre

60 comments

Programs, timetabling, and opening hours (13)

Several respondents advised that a lack of classes, programs, or unsatisfactory timetabling, stopped them from using the centre(s). Comments such as “need more programs”, “flexible hours”, and “available classes and times” were made.

Additionally, a small number of respondents stated that classes/programs that used to be offered but are no longer available was a reason for them to not use a centre. This included “morning spin classes”, the “old group fitness timetable”, “soccer programs”, and classes operating until 9pm.

Personal reasons (9)

Several respondents cited personal reasons as stopping them using centre facilities. Most often this was time pressure, with almost half stating that having children to care for was an issue. Other reasons offered were being a full-time employee, living “too far away”, and being “time poor”. One respondent stated they were not inspired to use the facilities on their own, while another stated the following:

Time - but keen to join the baby gym.

Women-only sessions (8)

Several respondents noted that a lack of women’s-only sessions or spaces was a deterrent to their use of facilities. While one respondent described this in detail (see below), most comments were simple statements conveying there is demand for “women’s only classes”, “more female sections”, or “women’s-only fitness classes”.

What stops me is as a Muslim woman who is covered, I don't feel comfortable to use the facilities with men.

One respondent wanted to see more female staff at facilities.

Lack of awareness of programs (8)

Several respondents stated they had little or no knowledge of classes or programs offered at facilities, or that understanding how to access them was challenging in some way. The community garden was cited in one comment in the context that the respondent did not know how to use it, but the majority of comments were of the types below:

Wasn't aware of the breadth of facilities & services.

Knowledge of how to use the spaces – i.e., what's available.

No ideas what was available and no advertisement.

Issue with the gym (7)

The gym was described as “too small”, “disconnected”, crowded, and “too loud” (in particular, for neurodiverse people). Additionally, personal training sessions said to be no longer offered stopped one respondent from attending, while not knowing how to use the equipment was another reason offered. The (types of) classes were said by one person to be a deterrent, and lastly, one person stated the following:

Lack of some machines in the gym.

Price (6)

The cost of attending facilities was said by a small number of respondents to be an issue. In each case this was stated in simple terms, such as “have to pay”, “lack of money”, and “pricing”.

Inadequate space (3)

A few respondents noted a lack of space at facilities; one person wanted “space to watch each other’s children”, while another noted a lack of adequate stadium space.

Other barriers (6)

Other barriers included two respondents each who noted the following: language barriers; fear of contracting COVID-19; and that spaces are uninviting (e.g., culturally, or due a lack of “buzz”).

Not culturally appropriate. Not inviting enough for people to use. Inadequate stadium space.

Lack of proper youth programs. Not culturally safe.

NMRC and pool

31 comments

Swimming pool (10)

Several respondents wanted to see the pool either covered or heated so that it could be used all year. The winter closure was said to disrupt use, and one respondent made the comment that a heated pool “available all year round at NMRC” would help them.

Would use pool in North Melbourne if it was indoor. Do use in summer.

Note that a couple of other comments addressed the pool in the context of women’s-only sessions, which are discussed below.

Access is difficult (9)

Several respondents noted that NMRC is either difficult to access due to “closures, renovation, lockdowns”, or the relatively isolated surrounds make the approach feel unsafe. Additionally, a couple of people noted that the centre is unwelcoming in less tangible ways such as “friendliness”, staff demeanour, or assumptions that the gym is for the sole use of football club affiliates.

NMRC has screen between equipment, corporatized area - need to go through NMFC entrance - Not welcoming. Difficult to get across to Arden Street. Traffic, Rocks, not safe with factories.

A comment was made that the community gardens “can’t be accessed”.

Lack of space (6)

A small number of respondents stated that NMRC has insufficient space (considering the demand for use) – most commonly this was the gym, which was described as “too small”, “congested”, and with “no space between equipment”. Respondents did not want to feel crammed in, rather, they appreciated being able to move about easily between equipment.

One respondent stated the following:

Separate the equipment and clean more regularly.

One respondent raised their difficulty in accessing convenient time slots for the netball courts, stating:

... the timeslots aren't exactly what we'd like because there's only one court and other hirers also want it.

Quality of equipment (3)

A few respondents wanted to see NMRC have better quality equipment, with comments deeming it “lacking in equipment” and “under resourced”.

One respondent simply stated they are deterred from using NMRC due to the need to “improve quality/service offer”.

Women’s-only sessions (3)

A lack of women’s-only sessions was a deterrent for a few respondents, who stated things like:

No Women’s only swimming and gym time.

Mixed gender swimming stops you.

Timetabling (2)

Certain classes that used to be offered, but now are not, were noted as aspects that have stopped a couple of respondents using NMRC. This included “after work group fitness classes” and “evening HIT classes”.

Other (2)

One respondent stated: “Fee structure - fees are much higher, how long would remain at NMCC price?”; and lastly, one person stated that the Huddle programs run by NM Football Club lacked widespread awareness and would benefit from promotion.

NMCC

15 comments

Requires maintenance (5)

Certain aspects of the NMCC were said by a small number of respondents to be in need of an upgrade, rejuvenation, or better maintenance. This included comments around the space being “older”, that it “doesn’t feel invested in”, and that certain equipment is faulty (e.g., netball courts lacking rings or soccer pitches “covered in holes”).

Additionally, one person stated that much could be done to make use of NMCC, but they feel this is lacking due to the low socio-economic nature of the area.

Opening hours and timetabling (4)

A small number of respondents were deterred from using NMCC because of its opening hours being too short. One comment was relatively detailed and outlined the local need for “somewhere to go”:

The community needs more access, it is either booked or is closed to the community when we want to access, the hours do not cater to needs of the community - weekends evenings, most young people are roaming free after 5pm and need somewhere to go.

Staffing and customer service (3)

A few respondents provided feedback about the level of customer service at North Melbourne Recreation Centre provided under the new operator. This feedback has been noted.

Awareness of facilities available (2)

A couple of respondents felt that information was lacking around what is available for them at the NMCC, including not knowing “what’s on” there.

Other (1)

One respondent stated that the centre is in need of air conditioning in summer, labelling this a potential “great improvement” to the facility.

General comments

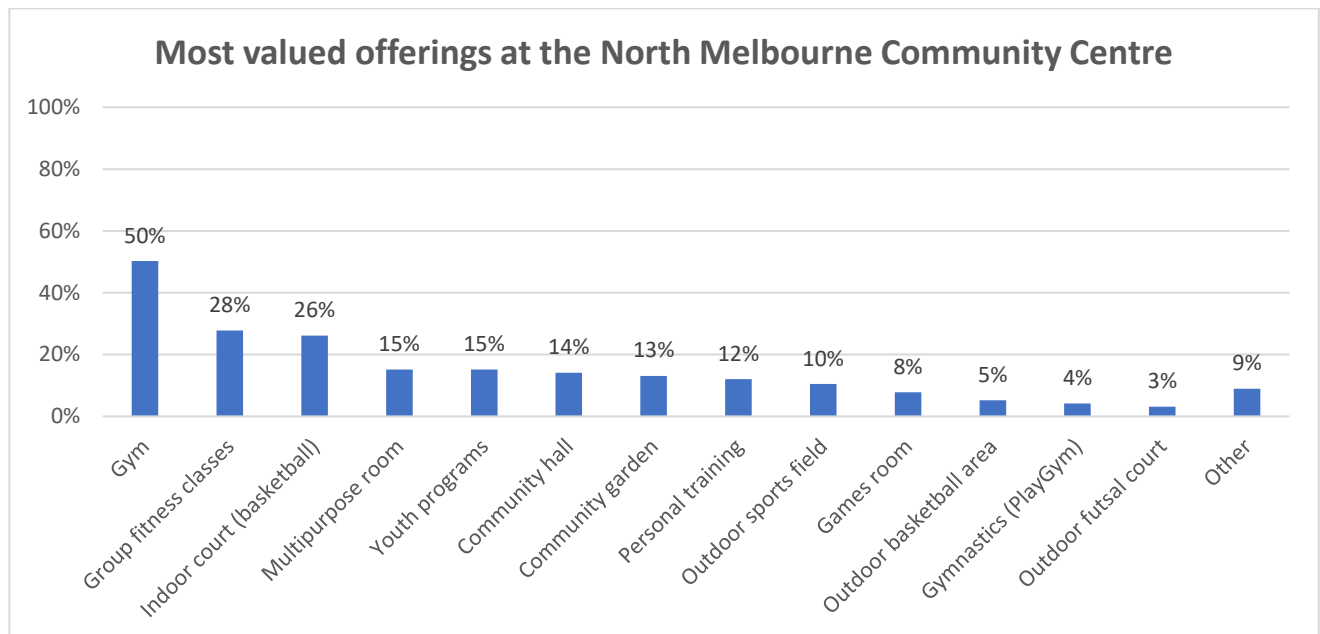
11 comments

Several comments were made in response to the question “What stops you from using the facilities or services at either of the centres?” that were simple statements of various sports or activities, including the following: “gym”, “reformer Pilates”, “group exercise classes”, and “swimming”, “pool”, or “expansive”.

Most valued offerings at the North Melbourne Community Centre

Respondents were asked: *Which ones of the following recreation offerings do you value most at the community centre?*

191 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

- > The gym was the most valued offering at the NMCC with 50% of respondents stating they value this the most.
- > Group fitness classes were 'most valued' by over a quarter (28%) of respondents who answered this question. This was closely followed by use of indoor basketball courts, with 26% stating this was most valued.
- > Fifteen percent (15%) each valued the multipurpose room and the youth programs, while slightly fewer selected the community hall (14%), community garden (13%), and personal training (12%).
- > All others were selected by 10% or fewer respondents.

'Other' responses included: six respondents stated the pool; two stated they use the youth programs; and one person each stated: it's closer to where I live; all of the above (except personal training and group fitness); games room, basketball, futsal; gym; yoga; playground; and children's sporting activities.

What respondents said: Additional recreation facilities and services people would like to see

Respondents were asked: *In the future, are there additional recreation facilities and services you'd like to see at the North Melbourne Community Centre or in the surrounding areas?*

Respondents provided their thoughts in a free-text box. These comments have been analysed below.

145 respondents answered this question.

Note: Comments often referred to the NMRC or did not specify a centre.

Sport and physical activity

75 comments

Pool or swimming (27)

A considerable number of respondents stated they would like to see a pool or swimming facilities at the NMCC or in the surrounding areas. Almost all comments were simple statements such as "pool", "swimming pool", "all-year-round swimming", or "indoor pool".

A small number of respondents added that a sauna or spa would be good, and additional points included a steam room, a pool for "hydro/rehabilitation", and "warm and cold swimming pool".

Basketball or netball (14)

Several respondents wanted to see facilities for basketball. Indoor and outdoor basketball were both noted; additionally, larger facilities were called for (with one person noting that "the kids sometimes nearly run into the brick walls, at the edges").

The following comments were made:

Indoor basketball courts. Activities for kids - basketball programs.

With the space available in this block, you could house decent basketball courts.

One respondent wanted to see more netball facilities, noting that there is little by way of space for young people to practice in their own time. They went on to state:

Netball is the #1 team sport among girls and the only major sport lacking local public facilities.

Yoga or Pilates (7)

A small number of respondents wanted to see yoga facilities in at the Community Centre or in North Melbourne. Two called for Pilates to be made available.

Soccer or football (7)

Soccer, indoor soccer, more soccer, indoor futsal, outdoor futsal, and soccer competitions were said to be missing in the North Melbourne area or the NMCC by a small number of people.

General sport (7)

A small number of respondents spoke in general terms about sport, indoor courts, sports or sports facilities, including ovals and sports fields. These included statements such as "more kids sports and activities", and that there is a "need for more active recreation spaces".

Tennis, table tennis, squash, badminton (6)

Three respondents wanted to see tennis facilities (including a wall for hitting against), and one respondent each wanted outdoor "ping pong", indoor badminton, and squash.

Stadiums (5)

A small number of respondents noted stadiums in responses. Two noted “indoor stadiums” and “more stadium time”; the others simply stated more stadium/s.

Other (2)

A pool table and a golf range were noted in one comment each as facilities missing in North Melbourne.

Activities for certain demographics

74 comments

For youth or children (28)

A considerable number of respondents wanted to see more recreation services and facilities for children and youth in North Melbourne. Kids’ programs, homework clubs, cooking, boxing, self-defense, sewing, yoga, sporting activities, basketball, and indoor soccer were all noted in this context. One person noted that “kids’ programs” are often fully booked, implying that more are needed.

Activities for kids - basketball programs.

Better and more youth programs. Child and family nurse.

Several respondents wanted to see spaces for youth and “activities for teens” or young people. This included on weekends and after school, as well as the school holidays (which was also deemed an appropriate time to schedule younger children’s activities or programs).

One person wanted to see “another sessional kindergarten” in the area.

For women (23)

Recreation services and facilities dedicated for women and/or girls were called for in a moderate number of comments. This was particularly the case for exercise-based activities such as swimming and gym sessions or classes. The following comments are typical examples of the many which were fairly consistent on this matter:

More activities for everyone - ladies, younger kids’ activities.

Women’s only sessions for recreation- regular time at gym for example.

Special days for women - a specific time.

Swimming, also space for women only.

Earlier and later opening (11)

Several respondents wanted to see longer opening hours so that before and after work access is easier. As well as mornings and evenings, weekends were frequently requested. Respondents wanted to be able to fit in exercise classes in particular around busy lives, as the following comments show.

Body Attack classes, circuit classes after work.

Wish there was more availability on the indoor basketball court for free play after 6pm on weekdays, plus open on weekends after 5pm.

One person noted that “lunch time recreation” was appealing for them.

Older people (5)

A small number stated that recreation opportunities for older residents were missing in North Melbourne generally or at the NMCC, with the following suggestions made: a senior’s exercise park; a greater range of exercise classes for age and disability, group bike rides for over 50s, and more services and facilities that appeal to older people.

One person wanted to see “aged care facilities and programs”.

Other groups (7)

A small number of respondents were concerned with ensuring accessibility for different ethnic groups, and those with disabilities or specific physical or mental health needs. A few respondents noted that mental health and wellbeing is maintained through exercise, and the Eritrean and Somali communities were cited. Lastly, those rehabilitating from injury and those with disabilities were also noted.

Gym or fitness classes

41 comments

A considerable number of respondents wanted to see more facilities and services to do with gym, workouts, and fitness classes. A bigger and better gym was called for (with more space), as were more group classes, gym services, and classes more broadly.

Several respondents cited particular classes they liked, including morning spin classes, 6pm group classes, boxing, and “step, circuit and pump in the evenings”. The following comment noted that there can be community cohesion benefits from a public or community gym:

Things that can help demographics cross over a bit more now that everyone can access the gym etc. will be great.

There were a small number of comments referencing timetables that used to operate at NMRC (prior to July 1); these respondents were in favour of returning to that timetable, considering it to offer a wider variety of classes that suit. In fact, it was generally preferred that there be more options of fitness classes.

Arts, crafts, or social aspects

29 comments

Spaces (11)

Several respondents noted they would like to see comfortable, quiet, or other public/community spaces for “hanging out”, studying, or for general or community use. These included library space or study space, local gathering places (for birthdays for example), and community rooms that are inexpensive and easy to book.

A community hall was also noted, as were the following simple appeals:

*More rooms available for private bookings.
Increased access to rooms and hours at the facility.*

Sewing, arts, and crafts (8)

Several respondents wanted to see more arts-related opportunities at local North Melbourne recreation facilities. A small number each wanted to see sewing classes or spaces, and arts/crafts of the following nature: basket weaving, places for the production and sale of handmade items, and art classes.

Other (10)

Other aspects included a few respondents who called for cooking facilities to be made available, and a couple each wanted to see garden or vegetable growing, social activities (such as “group type activities”), and dancing/singing classes or opportunities. Lastly, one person wanted a “movie theatre”.

Recreation

12 comments

Outdoor exercise (5)

Outdoor gyms or exercise equipment were supported by a small number of respondents. This was mostly in the form of “gym equipment outside” but also included a running track, a senior’s exercise park, and “active stations”.

Playgrounds (4)

A small number of respondents wanted to see more playgrounds, in particular ones with educational or interest value for children. More slides and a “natural playground” were called for.

Skate parks (3)

A few respondents noted that a skate park, or skateable surfaces such as a concrete pump track would be a good addition to the area.

Other comments

11 comments

Education or learning (8)

Several respondents cited classes (generally) or classes of an educational nature in comments. These included a learn to drive program, “community support and education”, and legal advice. Additionally, the following comments were made:

Personal development, mental health education.

Mobile library- used to come round and lend books out. Would like to see this again.

Technology (3)

A few respondents wanted to see a “video games room”, “computer usage”, and a “multipurpose games room”.

Discussion groups and email submissions

Below is a summary of discussions from 2 discussion groups, and 2 email submissions.

North Melbourne Youth

Number of participants	Demographic	Gender	Date of discussion group
15	Youth (aged 16-20)	Male	28 July, 2022

This discussion group was made up of male youth, aged between 16-20 years old. They are regular users at the NMCC, utilising the free access to the facility to participate in stadium sports and have a space to connect. They live nearby in the community housing estate.

Summary of feedback

This group of young males regularly use the sporting facilities at NMCC, particularly the basketball court and the communal lounge, as well as the soccer pitches. They value having free access to these spaces, and stated that allowing groups to hire out these spaces affects their ability to use them. These young people were particularly concerned that groups hiring the facility are not local or from North Melbourne and are being given preference for use of space when local community groups can't access the facilities.

The group gave the following suggestions around how their participation in health and wellbeing activities could be improved:

- > Make gym facilities free to use
- > Increase operational hours at the facility to 10pm in the evenings, and 9pm on weekends.
- > Facilitate community sports and activities for young adults and youth at no cost (with options year-round)
- > Make improvements to sporting fields/courts/pitches so they can be used year-round (shelter), in the evenings (lighting), and ensure they are in good condition (particularly the outdoor soccer pitch).

Another suggestion made by the group was that they would like to have time/access to use the Sound Studio with staff available.

Number of participants	Demographic	Gender	Date of discussion group
8	Muslim	Male	16 August 2022
6	Muslim	Female	16 August 2022

City of Melbourne representatives sought to have discussions at a local community agency, AMSSA, with 3 target groups: Adult Males, Adult Females and Young People, aged between 16 – 20 years old who live in the North Melbourne community housing estates.

Separate session times for each target group were organised but the session was fluid with attendees across both adult males and females attending both together and separately, and there were no young people present on-site for the session.

Any views on youth programs or feedback about needs of young people have been provided by the adult male and female groups. Any views on elder programs or feedback about needs of senior adults have been provided by the adult males group.

Summary of feedback

Male participants discussed services and facilities they wanted to see at NMCC and NMRC. These included sporting facilities, including a larger pool that is indoors, with assigned times for men's and women's lessons available; an indoor soccer pitch; and a larger gym with more/new equipment.

Suggestions from this group also highlighted the need for cultural sensitivity when designing programs and facilities to ensure that all members of the community can participate. An example of this is the desire for a heated indoor pool as women cannot use the outdoor pool that is currently there, and the current pool is too cold for some elderly community members.

Female participants discussed a range of aspects that focused broadly on women and children in the community, and centered around providing a safe, welcoming and useful space for the community.

Offering educational opportunities for adults and young women, spaces to socialise and be with young children, gender-separated sporting facilities and lessons, and staff who are more representative of their community were all important to these women. Extending the opening hours of the facility was also suggested.

Emailed submissions

Email submission 1

From: An Inner West Mental Health Senior Exercise Physiologist from Moonee Ponds- Waratah Clinic

This respondent works in partnership with RecLink to provide services to 18–64-year-olds, many of whom have complex mental health issues and face a variety of barriers to participation.

The program runs from NMCC gym. The participants consider the gym a 'safe space' to use, as there aren't too many people using the gym.

Barriers raised in this submission include transport (something RecLink is involved in currently); sensory barriers, such as music playing; money; a need for safe spaces and trusted facilitators; and facing discrimination when using these spaces.

Email submission 2

From: Leader and representative of local community

Subject: North Melbourne Community Centre Consultation

- Prioritising the centre for people that live in the local community
- Reviewing opening hours as the centre is not open when people want to use it, for example Saturday afternoon the centre closes at 3pm
- Having free programs/facility access for young people who would like to do things with friends. This helps to reduce antisocial behaviour
- People want structured and unstructured activity
- Want to have rooms available to hire, in particular for large numbers
- Current process is people book for long periods in advance which makes it difficult to access the space
- Community weren't particularly concerned with the gym relocating, however, the community were concerned about not being consulted
- Happy with the decision to partner with the Huddle
- Community would like to be part of the future planning for North Melbourne Community Centre and decisions made by City of Melbourne.

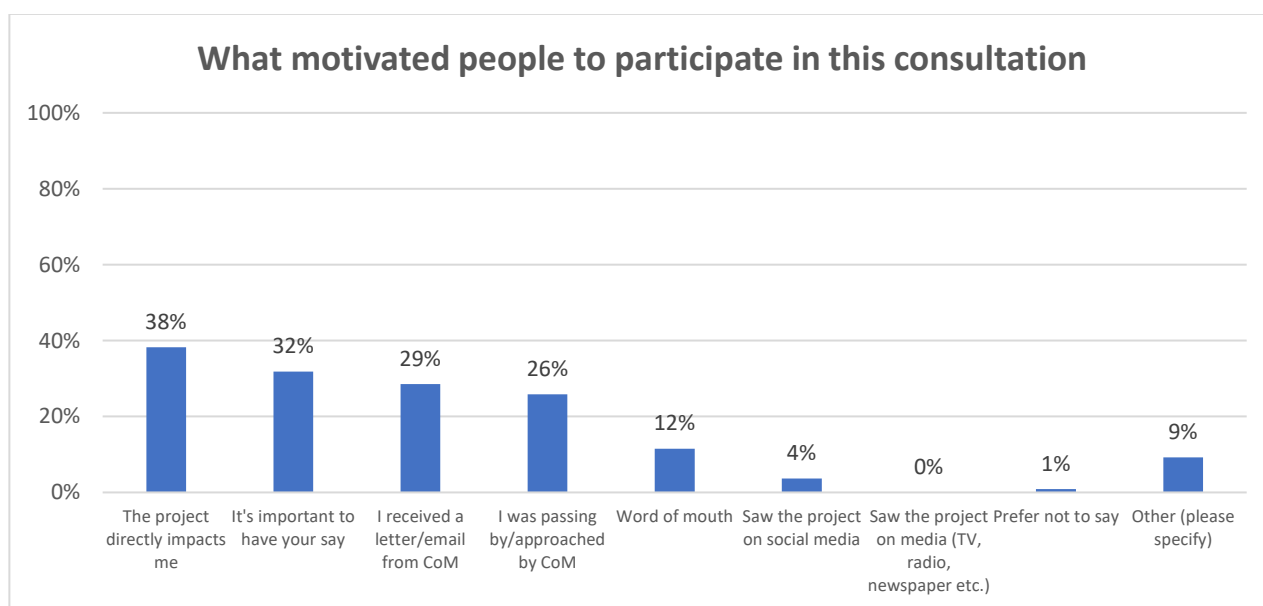
Survey respondent characteristics

Note that the respondent characteristics below relate only to the 223 people who completed the online survey through the Participate Melbourne website.

What motivated people to participate in this consultation

Respondents were asked: *What motivated you to participate in this consultation today?*

217 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

- > Over a third (38%) of respondents were directly affected by the project.
- > Just under a third (32%) felt it was important to have a say and contribute to the future of the city.
- > Over a quarter (29%) reported that they were motivated to contribute due to a letter or email from CoM and a similar number (26%) stated they were passing by or approached by CoM.
- > Word of mouth accounted for 12% of people who responded to the consultation.

'Other' responses: Twenty (20) 'other' comments were made by respondents. Half emphasised their personal investment in the outcome, either relaying the importance of the facilities – mainly the NMCC – to them, or stating that they are interested in the future of these facilities (6), while others expressed concern about the potential closure of the NMCC gym (4). These respondents reiterated concern that the NMCC would be closed; this was based on claims that the surrounding community has needs that this specific facility caters to, and that it would be detrimental to the area for it to close.

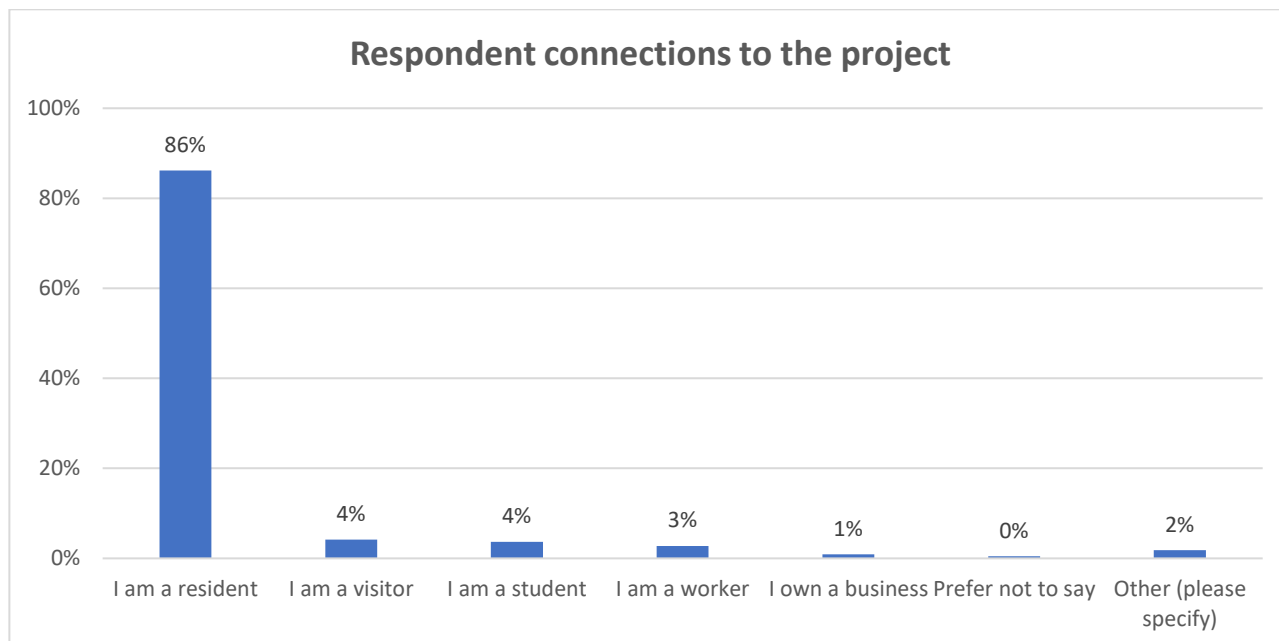
The second tranche of comments was from those who noted the way in which they heard about the consultation (6), this included the Participate Melbourne website, notices up at NMCC, Zumba class attendees, a Council Future Melbourne Committee meeting, a friend's recommendation, a letter from AMSSA, and that "I was emailed".

Three comments raised concerns about the consultation process (3); while two respondents felt it was their responsibility to participate in the engagement for the community or their children (2).

Respondent connections to this project

Respondents were asked: *Which of the following best describes your connection to this City of Melbourne project?*

217 respondents answered this question.



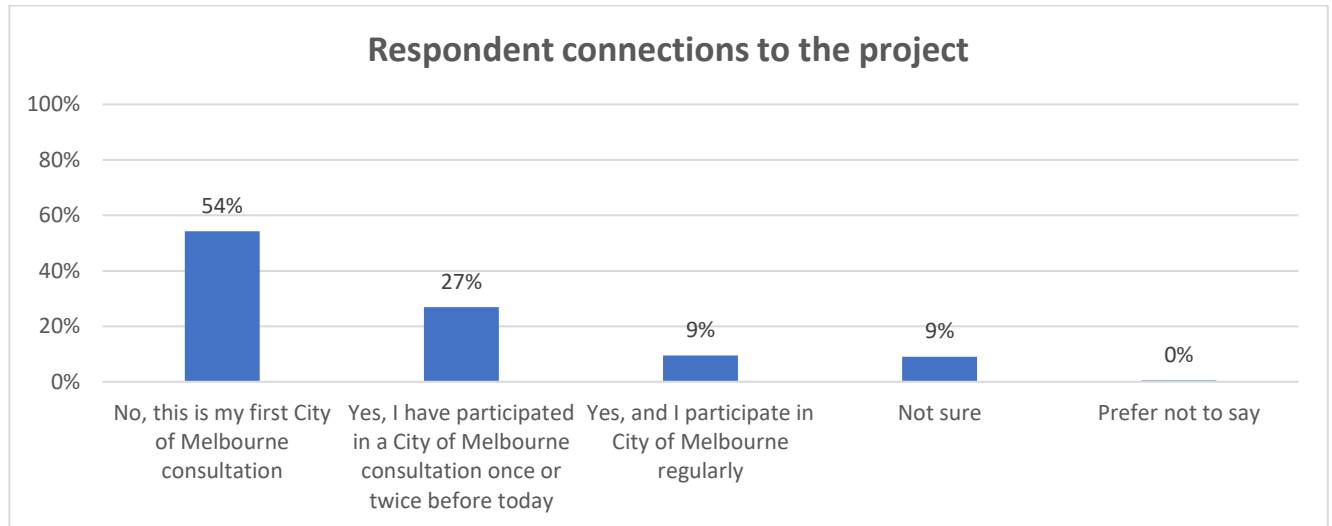
Findings:

- > The majority of respondents (86%) were residents of North Melbourne.
- > Four percent each (4%) were visitors and students, and 3% were workers in the area.
- > Other responses included four in which respondents stated they were members of “the gym”, NMRC, the NM Football Club, or that they “use the gym”.

Previous participation in City of Melbourne consultations

Respondents were asked: *Have you participated in a consultation with City of Melbourne before?*

212 respondents answered this question.



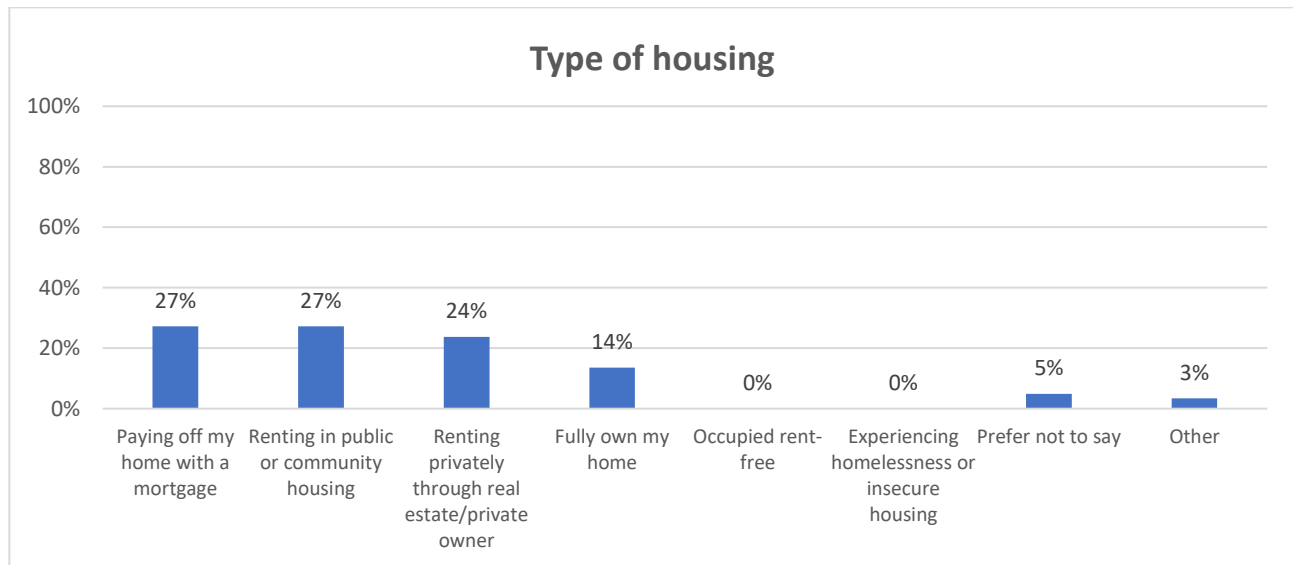
Findings:

- > For over half of respondents (54%), this was the first time they had taken part in a CoM consultation.
- > Just over a quarter (27%) of respondents had contributed once or twice before.
- > Nine percent (9%) were regular contributors, and 9% were not sure.

Respondents' living situation

Respondents were asked: *Which of the following best describes where you live?*

206 respondents answered this question.



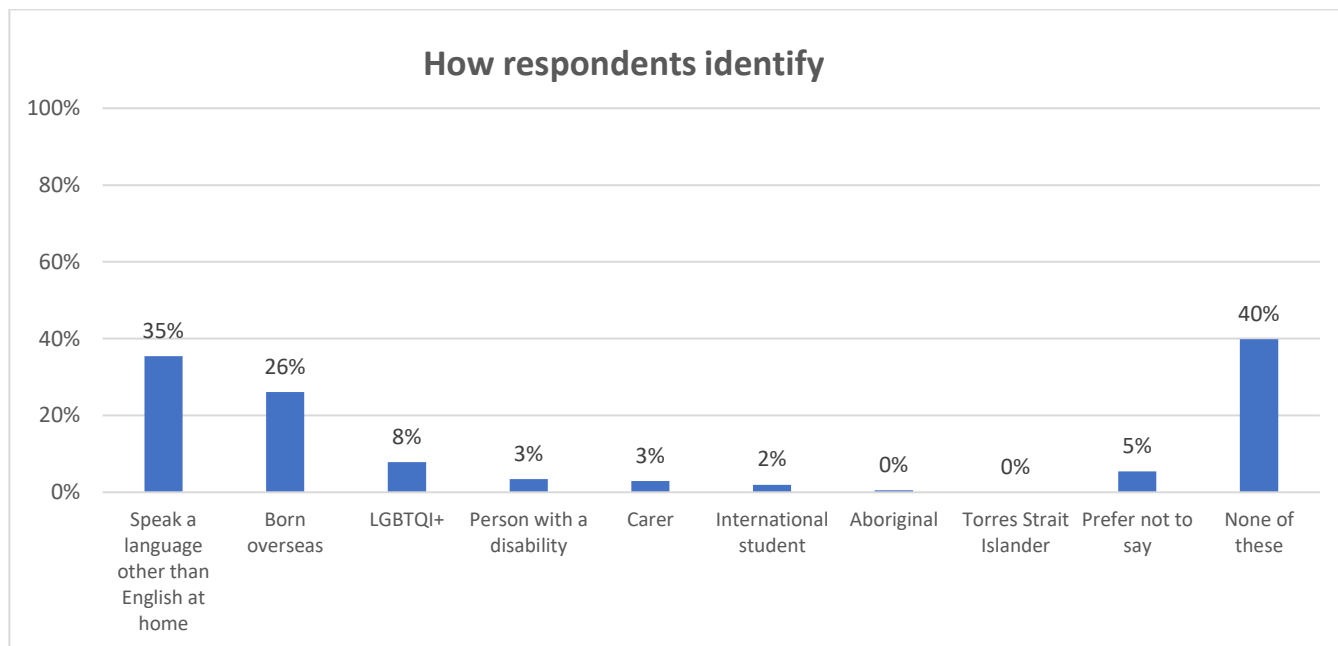
Findings:

- > Equal numbers of respondents were renting in public/community housing, or paying off a home with a mortgage (27% each).
- > Just over half of respondents (51%) were in rental housing.
- > A similar number (24%) were renting private accommodation (through a real estate company or a private owner).
- > Fourteen percent (14%) of respondents stated they fully own their home.

How respondents identify

Respondents were asked: *Do you identify with any of the following?*

203 respondents answered this question.



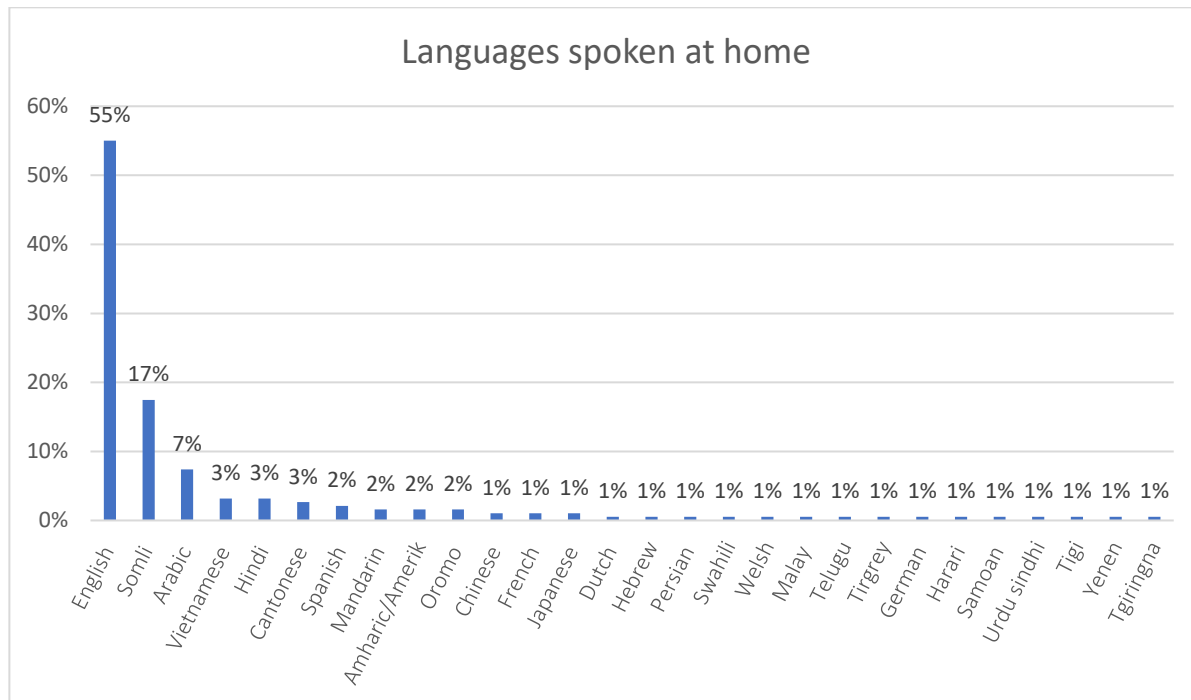
Findings:

- > Just over a third (35%) of respondents stated they speak a language other than English at home, and one quarter (26%) were born overseas.
- > Forty percent (40%) of respondents did not identify with any of the groups offered and 5% preferred not to say.
- > Eight percent (8%) identified as LGBTQI+, and all other groups were represented in 3% or less of respondents.
- > No respondents identified as Aboriginal or as a Torres Strait Islander.

Languages spoken

Respondents were asked: *What language do you speak at home?*

189 respondents answered this question.



Note that percentages are out of the 189 respondents who answered this question.

Findings:

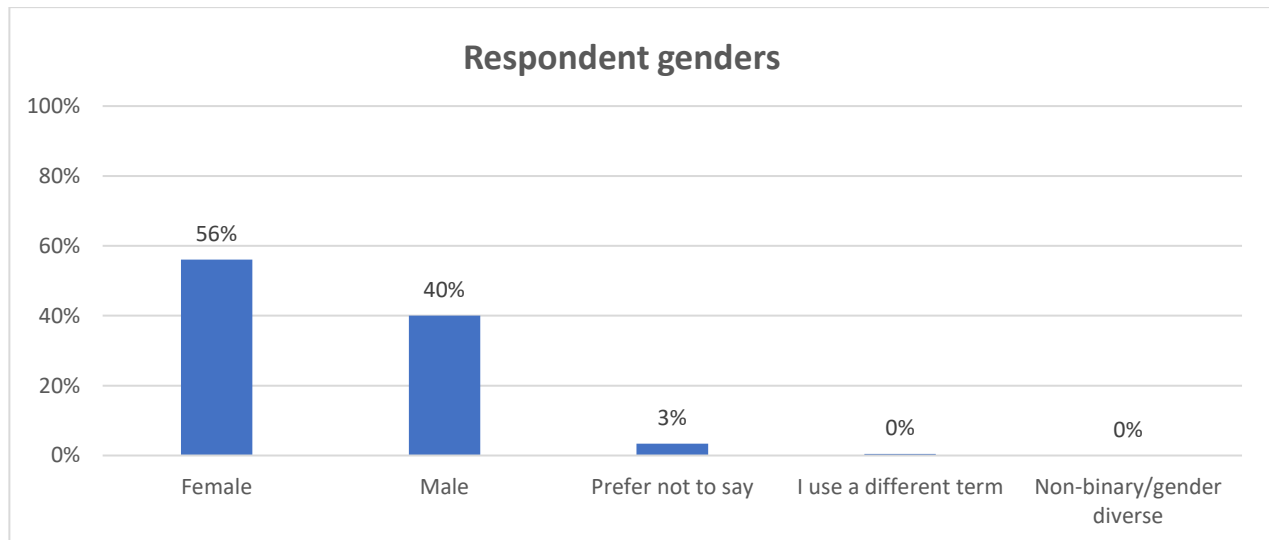
- > English was the most commonly stated language that respondents speak at home (55%).
- > Somali (17%) and Arabic (7%) were the next most commonly spoken languages.

Respondent genders

Respondents were asked: *Do you identify with any of the following?*

*Figures have been rounded to the nearest decimal point so do not add exactly to 100.

205 respondents answered this question.



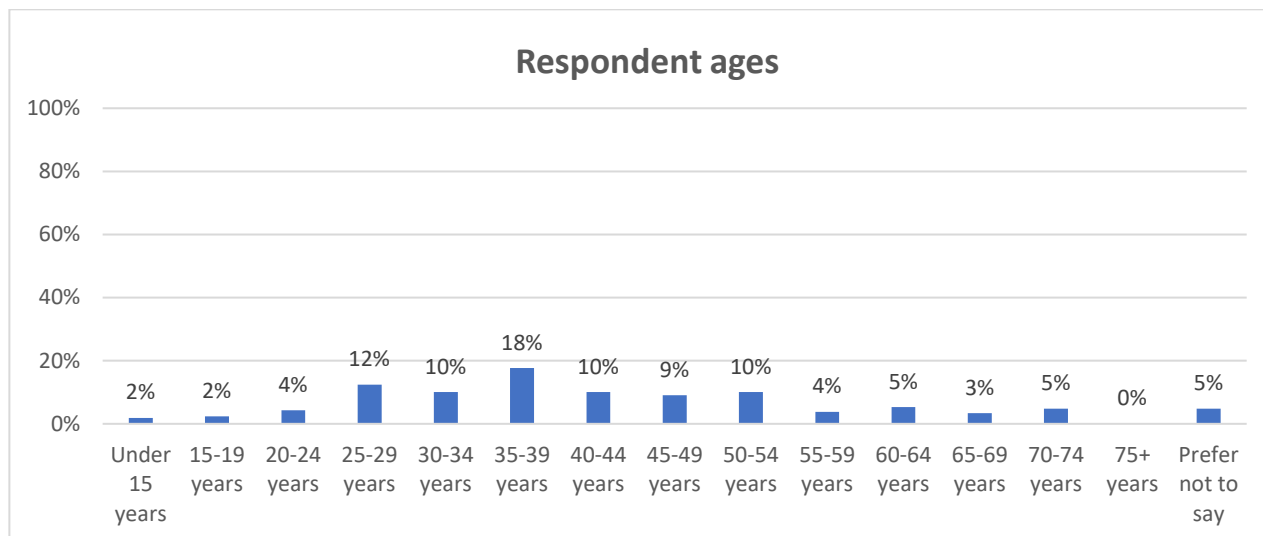
Findings:

- > Over half (56%) of respondents were female.
- > Just under half were male (40%).
- > Three percent (3%) preferred not to say.
- > One person stated they use a different term, this was "non binary".

Respondent ages

Respondents were asked: *What is your age?*

209 respondents answered this question.



Findings:

- > The largest age group that participated were those aged 35-39 (18%). Following that, 25-29-year-olds comprised 12% of respondents.
- > Ten percent (10%) of respondents each fell into the age groups 30-34, 40-44, and 50-54.
- > Almost half (48%) of respondents were under 40, and just over half were over 40 (52%)
- > Note that an additional fifteen 16–20-year-old males contributed to discussion group data, and that demographics from other discussion group participants were not recorded.

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Global Research
Turning Information Into Insight