

# Research Poster Awards 2023



**Title :** Healthcare gaps and barriers to service utilisation within Geelong refugee communities; a co-designed research and service improvement project

Project Team Leader: Erin Parker

Project Team Members: Tracey Young, Maryam Esghaei, Eh Blu Moo Htay Thu, Joseph Daffy, Simone Haines, Aisha Sallam.

## INTRODUCTION

Barwon Health provides healthcare to refugee populations residing in Geelong. Recently, the North Area Primary Care team employed bicultural workers, who assist refugee communities to access relevant healthcare services and also support healthcare providers to engage effectively with refugee consumers. Bicultural workers provided input into the planning of this research project, and continue to assist with service planning.

## OBJECTIVES

The research aims to identify healthcare priorities and obstacles affecting refugees, gathering data on service gaps, establishing community needs and co-designing improvements with bi-cultural workers.

## METHOD

27 participants from refugee backgrounds attended focus groups at the Corio Community Health Centre. Prior to attending focus groups, participants were called with an interpreter to be read the plain language statement in their spoken language. During focus groups, interpreters were present to provide translation of all conversations as they occurred.

An inductive thematic analysis was completed to analyse data.

## DISCUSSION

This study makes a contribution to existing literature by highlighting barriers faced by refugees in regional areas, when accessing a wide range of healthcare services. It underscores the significance of co-designing responsive healthcare services, thereby informing the development of targeted interventions and services tailored to the unique needs of refugee communities.

## CONCLUSION

The outcomes of this research includes improving Barwon Health's responsiveness to local health priorities, gaining a better understanding of refugee communities' healthcare needs, and fostering direct community involvement in service redesign.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We express gratitude to the traditional custodians of the land and waterways where this work was undertaken – the Wadawurrung people of the Kulin nation.

We thank Barwon Health, in collaboration with North Area Primary Care team , for their support in providing healthcare services to this population.

Many thanks to Maryam Esghaei for preparing this poster.

## RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the collected data established four key themes.

**Language Barriers:** interpreters are not always used for health appointments. "Sometimes you've waited a long time for your appointment, then you don't get to say what is wrong with you." (Afghan male participant). "When we see an interpreter or worker who is Karen, we feel safe." (Karen female participant).

**Health Literacy:** Level of knowledge of health services is a significant barrier. Knowing where to go for appointments, or who to see for each problem. "Can I choose my own GP?" (Afghan male participant).

**A one size fits all approach:** Standard communication practices and certain organisational processes limit engagement for refugees. Participants described GP appointments with a strict 15 minute appointment time limit, leaving no time to ask any questions to understand their healthcare. Written correspondence is always in English and cannot always be read. "Sometimes we receive letters in the mail and because no-one can read them, we miss the appointments." (Afghan female participant).

**Capacity Building:** all groups expressed a desire to improve health knowledge and requested group information sessions, delivered by health professionals. Participants want to learn from one another, with one another "As a community, we help each other." (Karen women's group participant).

Group	Participants	Facilitator	Bicultural worker
Karen Women	<i>n</i> = 8	Tracey Young	Eh Blu Moo Htay Thu
Karen Men	<i>n</i> = 4	Joseph Daffy	Eh Blu Moo Htay Thu
Afghan Women	<i>n</i> = 10	Tracey Young	Maryam Esghaei Aisha Sallam
Afghan men	<i>n</i> = 5	Joseph Daffy	Maryam Esghaei Aisha Sallam



Barwon Health Bicultural Workers (from left): Aisha Sallam, Eh Blu Moo Htay Thu and Maryam Esghaei.