

Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Support for Culturally Diverse Seniors

Culturally diverse older people experience an increased risk of poor mental and physical health due to factors such as migration journey, trauma, marginalisation, visa status, financial hardship, socioeconomic disadvantage and social isolation. Research in this field has revealed that discrimination, racism and marginalisation can act as a barrier to accessing services for culturally diverse seniors which can have an impact on their mental health.

Aged care providers are confronted with older people and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are struggling with depression, shame, lack of support and often reach a crisis point before they seek help and more knowledge about appropriate referral pathways and improved networking with mental health support services is needed.

Key findings from research in this field from the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria¹ as well as the Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing² reveals that:

- Immigrant, refugee and asylum seeker populations worldwide are at high risk of mental health issues.
- Culturally and linguistically diverse communities receive mental health support more likely at an acute and crisis stage rather than early intervention services.
- Beliefs and attitudes toward mental health differ according to faith and beliefs. For example, some people may believe that depression is self-centred or would cure itself if people had tried harder.
- Strategies to cope with mental health issues go beyond Western medical models include praying to God, faith leaders, talking to a family member or a friend, meditation or yoga, poetry, arts, complementary medications, psychologists and counselling services.
- There can be a reluctance to seek help. This aspect includes the need for privacy and confidentiality about mental health issues among community members.
- There is a need for more community education about mental health issues that is culturally appropriate.
- Language barriers were significant hurdles to accessing and utilising mental health services.
- Stigma plays a significant role in how people access services and understand mental health. Stigma about mental illness is common in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Stigma can lead to experiences of social segregation and discrimination. For example, being labelled 'mad or crazy'.
- Carers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds reveal they needed better information and access to culturally responsive mental health support.
- New models of mental health care were found to be required that focus on inter-agency co-operation between health services and ethno-specific and multicultural community groups and organisations, as well as the development of community-based initiatives.
- Frail older people from culturally diverse backgrounds often seek bilingual and bicultural support first

• ¹ [Culturally Responsive Mental Health Paper Released - Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria \(eccv.org.au\)](http://eccv.org.au)

• ² [Perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse \(CALD\) community members regarding mental health services: A qualitative analysis - Radhamony - 2023 - Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing - Wiley Online Library](#)

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so that they can make the right links and find the right support when they need it.

- The relationship between depression and dementia needs to be clarified in relation to mental health issues and the care of frail, older people.

Key Considerations

- Build rapport with culturally and linguistically communities, families, and carers to establish relationships of trust when it comes to informing them about mental health.
- Be aware of cultural and religious attitudes and beliefs about mental health (e.g. curses, omens).
- Be aware of the diverse community approaches to mental health and wellbeing (e.g. dancing, prayer, collective responses, art practices, poetry, connecting to homeland).
- Be aware of gendered approaches to mental health services (e.g. migrant men are less likely to access talking therapies).
- Be aware of shame and stigma and its impact on mental health and mental health disclosure and develop mental health stigma reduction programs within ethnic communities.
- Develop mental health resources that are sensitive to the cultural, linguistic, and spiritual needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and co-design service models with people from multicultural communities, families, and carers.
- Inform and raise awareness about mental health in community languages to culturally and linguistically diverse community members, carers, and families.
- Work in partnership with peak bodies and specialists in mental health care and multicultural community engagement (e.g. Victorian Transcultural Mental Health, Embrace as part of Mental Health Australia, Foundation House, Beyond Blue, Mensline).
- Co-design initiatives with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, leaders and peak bodies.
- Be aware of history of trauma and apply culturally appropriate trauma-informed practices.
- Understand the refugee and migrant experience and its impact on mental health and wellbeing (e.g. PTSD).
- Create the promotion and co-operation of mental health services, GPs, and ethno-specific and multicultural community services to more effectively reach older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Conduct further research on the impact that migration has on mental health regarding the specific needs of older people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

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Good Practice Stories

Embrace Mental Health Website

[Embrace Multicultural Mental Health \(the Embrace Project\)](#) is run by Mental Health Australia and provides a national focus on mental health and suicide prevention for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. It provides a national platform for Australian mental health services and multicultural communities to access resources, link to services and information in a culturally accessible format. The Embrace Project works towards an equitable mental health system which reflects and responds well to the needs of Australia's multicultural population.

The key objectives of the project are to:

- Increase participation of consumers and carers from CALD backgrounds in mental health services;
- Improve outcomes for CALD mental health consumers, carers and their families;
- Increase mental health awareness, knowledge and capacity in CALD communities, and
- Improve cultural responsiveness and diversity of the mental health workforce.

The project partners with key stakeholders such as the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia (FECCA), and the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) to deliver the project and is informed by a CALD Mental Health Consumer and Carer Lived Experience Group, composed of representatives from each state and territory and a Stakeholder Group, consisting of representatives with multicultural mental health expertise and links to CALD communities.

Foundation House

[Foundation House](#) provides a comprehensive range of individual and family support services to assist people from refugee backgrounds to address the effects of their traumatic experiences, such as:

- Specialised individual and/or family counselling;
- Psycho-education and information;
- Access to complementary therapies;
- Facilitated referrals, case management, secondary consultation, and co-joint work with other services
- Client advocacy;
- Links to group programs or community capacity building programs;
- Foundation House runs the Victorian Refugee Health Network which aims to facilitate greater coordination and collaboration amongst health and community services in order to reduce health disparities experienced by people from refugee backgrounds.

World Wellness Group

[World Wellness Group](#) was founded by five Brisbane health workers who worked in various NFP and public sector professional roles in multicultural health and mental health for the past 30 years. As a result of a long history of multicultural health programs invariably being de-funded due to changes in policy and funding priorities despite positive evaluation results, the founders implemented a vision of an independent health social enterprise that could deliver services and work on fixing systems that create disadvantage in the first place.

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World Wellness Group's Mental Health and Wellbeing Services provide individually and culturally tailored, recovery oriented mental health services across the continuum from psychosocial, low intensity and mild to moderate mental health needs.

Useful Resources and Further Reading

Framework for Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (2014)

- <https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-03/framework-for-mental-health-in-multicultural-australia---towards-culturally-inclusive-service-delivery.pdf>

Culturally Responsive Mental Health Paper, Ethnic Communities Council of Australia, 2011

- [Culturally Responsive Mental Health Paper Released - Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria \(eccv.org.au\)](http://eccv.org.au)

Perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) community members regarding mental health services: A qualitative analysis, 2023

- [Perspectives of culturally and linguistically diverse \(CALD\) community members regarding mental health services: A qualitative analysis - Radhamony - 2023 - Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing - Wiley Online Library](#)

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