



Settlement
Council
of Australia

Bi-Cultural Health Navigator Program Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC)

AT A GLANCE

Target participants: People with refugee and migrant backgrounds interested in working in the health sector

Aim of program:

The program trains people with refugee and migrant backgrounds interested in working in the health sector to better understand and navigate the health system in Australia, so that they can then be employed to deliver COVID-19 information and support to multicultural communities in Whittlesea.

Organisations involved / partnerships:

The program was initiated as a partnership between Melbourne Polytechnic, Northern Health and Whittlesea Community Connections.

Location: Melbourne's outer northern growth areas, particularly the LGA's of Whittlesea and Hume.

Funding:

Victorian Department of Health
Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing
City of Whittlesea
Cancer Council Victoria
DPV Health
Drummond Street Services



Bi-Cultural Health Navigator Program

INTRODUCTION

The Bi-Cultural Health Navigator program led by the settlement team at Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) trains people with refugee and migrant backgrounds interested in working in the health sector to understand and better and navigate Australia's health system. Bi-Cultural Health Navigators gained employment delivering COVID-19 information and support to multicultural communities in Whittlesea and Hume. This included in language information about when and where to get tested, current health advice and reliable and accurate information about Australia's vaccination program.

Each partner brings their own knowledge and strengths: MP is a training and further education provider and AMEP provider, NH is a major regional health provider of specialist and acute health services and WCC is a place based service with strong connections and engagement with diverse communities.

As the program evolved the City of Whittlesea integrated the Bi-Cultural Health Navigators into the Council's Emergency Management response. This provided additional local employment and engagement opportunities. WCC also engaged with Drummond Street and Cancer Council to extend the work of the Bi-Cultural Health Navigators beyond COVID-19 response to other areas of primary health and mental health, particularly screening and prevention.

WCC provides on-going mentoring support to help navigators address unspoken barriers working in an Australian workplace.

Navigators represent the community's rich diversity and use their languages and cultural knowledge to support community to access trusted information and support to live in a COVID-19 safe way. Navigators deliver community information sessions, develop resources and attend pop-up information booths and vaccination clinics.

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Why this program worked well comes down to a number of key elements:

Motivation: The Health Navigator course is a voluntary elective, attracting people with a genuine interest in working in health. Many of the participants come from health backgrounds and are keen to apply previous skills and experience in Australia. Some hold overseas health qualifications that are not recognised in Australia.

Cultural safety: Health Navigators, trained by WCC, are able to facilitate a culturally safe environment where community members feel welcomed and comfortable seeking support and information.

Nature of the work: Respectable and well-matched to their skills and interest. Some Bi-Cultural Health Navigators needed to compromise with their career aspirations but chose to do so. Some were not able to find employment in Australia and this program gave participants and potential candidates a choice and did not assume they were under or overqualified.

Opportunities to improve language skills: Health Navigators feel that their English language skills improve as a result of working together with staff from the City of Whittlesea, Northern Health, Melbourne Polytechnic and WCC.

One to one and group support: The program considers people at each stage of their employment journey, whether they are seeking entry into the workforce or pursuing skilled career opportunities.



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CHALLENGES

The development and coordination of the elective course required a concerted effort. An AMEP EAL (English as an Additional Language) teacher participated in the co-design process together with health service providers, volunteer coordinators and WCC. This ensured a holistic and coordinated approach.

KEY LEARNINGS

The success of this program is based on its partnership approach and the commitment of the organisations involved. The co-design process enabled the program to benefit from participants existing knowledge and lived experience of health systems from their country of origin and within their new settlement context. The process built from the knowledge of participants and stakeholders to design and deliver strong and helpful support.

OUTCOMES

This program has improved multicultural communities' health literacy, increased employment outcomes, and built the capacity of health and community services.

The program developed a sustainable employment model and pathway into health services and industries with a total of 24 people with migrant and refugee backgrounds employed through the first 18 months of the program. For most, this was their first job in Australia and the experience and confidence gained has enabled them to secure further work.

The community also benefited from increased COVID-19 literacy, increased access to relevant information to make informed decisions which had a direct impact on achieving higher vaccination rates in our region, particularly among CALD communities.

And finally, the program helped build the capacity of health and community services organisations and local Council to reflect community in a way that facilitates, fosters and mentors local skills and talent, and builds a bridge into the communities they want to work with. Overall, it improved culturally competent health care, patient engagement and health outcomes.



Whittlesea Community Connections wins People's Choice Award for their poster, 2023 National Settlement Conference

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT

<https://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/>

<https://www.whittleseacommunityconnections.org.au/bi-cultural-health-navigators/>