

# The formation of a Refugee Health Research Consortium in Victoria

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on behalf of the Refugee Health Research Consortium.

## Introduction

Australia resettles around 13,750 refugees each year. The convoluted mechanism of selection and entry into the country is matched by the complex social and health care challenges facing refugees after arrival. Health and community services seeking to assist refugees are in turn challenged by at times unfamiliar physical and mental health conditions, language differences, social isolation, cultural misunderstandings, and the complexity of the Australian health care system.

The provision of high quality accessible health care to refugees in Australia requires coordinated multi-sector responses informed by high quality research, knowledge exchange and development.

This poster outlines the formation and initial activities of a consortium of Victorian policy makers, health care providers, academics and community organisations collaborating in refugee health research.

## Formation

The Refugee Health Research Consortium was formed in early 2010 as a response by local organisations with a common interest in refugee health research in the Cities of Greater Dandenong and Casey in south east metropolitan Melbourne. This region receives up to one quarter of all new arrival refugees in Victoria each year and is a significant site of secondary resettlement within Australia, particular for people from Afghanistan.

Previously individual organisations had been engaged in refugee health research but soon realised the benefits of collaborating across the health and wellbeing sectors (1). Interested organisations included: General Practice, community health, hospital specialists, refugee settlement services, torture and trauma services, mental health services, Victorian government departments of health and human services, government policy makers and academic institutions.

In 2009 a number initial of meetings were held to determine the aims and the structure of the Consortium. Start up funding was provided from amongst member organisations. Terms of Reference were developed and adopted in 2010.

Academic expertise is provided by the Southern Academic Primary Care Research Unit. This Academic Unit is a partnership of Monash University, Southern Health and the Dandenong Casey General Practice Association. This Academic Unit is directed by Prof. Grant Russell, Professor of General Practice Research, School of Primary Health Care, Monash University.

## Aims

The Consortium aims to optimise the health of refugees by:

- fostering collaboration on refugee health research in the region,
- engaging in knowledge transfer and exchange, and
- informing state, national and international policy and practice in refugee health.

The Consortium environment allows for improved information sharing, research collaboration, collaborative grants application, and liaison with state and commonwealth government in the setting of national health system reform.

## Key activities

Research activities include:

- Refugee health needs assessment
- Costs and benefits of varied primary health care service delivery models for refugees
- The mental health of refugees
- Mental health of Afghan women with refugee experiences
- Refugee youth in crisis
- Refugees and General Practice

Consortium members meet monthly. A Mental Health subgroup meets monthly to bimonthly to coordinate refugee mental health research.



## Members

The Consortium's members are:

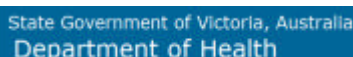
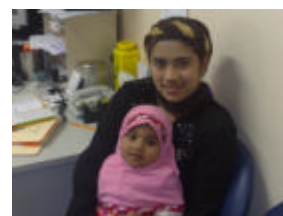
- Monash University
  - Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences
  - Faculty of Arts
- Southern Health
  - Ambulatory and Community Care
  - Dandenong Hospital Refugee Health Service
  - Southern Synergy (mental health)
- Dandenong Casey General Practice Association
- Foundation House
  - (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)
- Victorian Department of Health
- Victorian Department of Human Services
- Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES) Settlement

## References

- (1) Lavis JN, Lomas J, Hamid M, Sewankambo NK. Assessing country-level efforts to link research to action. Bull World Health Organ. 2006 Aug;84(8):620-8.

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