

Report Brief 3

Ageing and mental health issues for older people from CALD backgrounds

Highlights

- ▶ Older people from CALD backgrounds have a higher risk of mental health issues than the population born in Australia.
- ▶ The research shows an underuse of mental health services by older people from CALD backgrounds.
- ▶ Older people from CALD backgrounds tend to present at later stages of illness compared to other older people in Australia.

Issue

Mental health is a significant issue for all Australians. Older people from CALD backgrounds have been recognised as one of the groups at greatest risk of mental illness.

Older people from CALD backgrounds may face a higher risk of mental health illness for a number of reasons that vary across cultural groups and individuals. These reasons include:

- ▶ traumatic circumstances at, or prior to, migration;
- ▶ a loss of identity or sense of disconnection as a result of migration; and
- ▶ lower socioeconomic status of some older people from CALD backgrounds that can lead to poor knowledge of mental illness and delayed diagnosis.

Project background

This report brief highlights key findings from a review of research project undertaken by the University of Adelaide for FECCA. The aim of the project was to identify current research about best practice in meeting the health, wellbeing and social inclusion needs of older CALD Australians as they age and to make this evidence accessible to aged care service providers, researchers and policy makers. Four broad topic areas were covered in the review:

1. Older people from CALD backgrounds in general;
2. Older people from CALD backgrounds with dementia;
3. Ageing and mental health issues for older people from CALD backgrounds; and
4. CALD carers and carers of older people from CALD backgrounds.

This report brief highlights findings on the mental health topic. The full report describing the findings of this review along with a comprehensive, searchable database of all research identified is available at www.fecca.org.au.

Factors affecting the mental health of older people from CALD backgrounds

The factors that affect mental health vary across individuals and birthplace groups. The research has identified the following issues:

- ▶ level of acculturation in Australia;
- ▶ cultural norms in the country of origin;
- ▶ whether children are present in Australia or still in the home country;
- ▶ English language ability;
- ▶ refugee experience either recent or in earlier life; and
- ▶ living in residential aged care.

Access to mental health information and services

The research shows an underuse of mental health services by older people from CALD backgrounds. A number of challenges have been identified for some CALD groups including:

- ▶ poor understanding of mental illness;
- ▶ cultural stigma attached to mental health issues;
- ▶ barriers in accessing bilingual health services or translated information; and
- ▶ delayed help-seeking behaviour leading to delayed diagnosis of mental illness.

There is an identified need for more widely available mental health services that meet the language and cultural needs of older CALD Australians. Service providers including GPs, specialists, nursing, and allied health staff need to take a culturally inclusive approach to addressing mental health issues.

Culturally sensitive care

Cultural understanding needs to be included when diagnosing mental illness. A body of research explores the validity of mainstream tools used to screen and diagnose mental illness for people from different cultural backgrounds. Research shows there are differences in scores on mental health scales according to language and ethnicity.

Responses and treatments to mental illness also need to be culturally sensitive. For example, consideration should be given to traditional therapies and medications.

Research gaps

There is a body of research about CALD understandings of mental health issues, the factors contributing to poorer mental health outcomes for some older CALD Australians and the importance of using culturally sensitive tools to assess mental health conditions. However, little research exists about:

- ▶ understanding of how the life course, family and community play a role in mental health;
- ▶ effective practices, treatments and care approaches for older people from CALD backgrounds after a mental health diagnosis has been made; and
- ▶ the cultural and socioeconomic dimensions that contribute to delayed diagnosis of mental illness.

Resources for service providers

NSW Transcultural Mental Health Centre:

www.dhi.health.nsw.gov.au/tmhc/default.aspx

Mental Health in Multicultural Australia (MHIMA):

www.mhima.org.au/

For more information please contact FECCA at admin@fecca.org.au or (02) 6282 5755.

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