

Community Participation for Seniors from Emerging Communities



Project overview

The Community Participation for Seniors from Emerging Communities project aimed to build capacity and capabilities of seniors from six target communities: Sudanese (Dinka), Ethiopian (Amharic), Somali (Somali), Burmese (Karen and Chin), Filipino (Tagalog) and Afghani (Dari). The project engaged with these groups in the Brimbank, Hobsons Bay, Wyndham and Greater Dandenong local government areas (LGAs) and surrounding areas to support them to access and participate in Victorian seniors support programs and services.

Project description

The project's objective was to build capacity and capabilities of seniors from the six emerging culturally and linguistically diverse communities to access and participate in support health and wellbeing programs and services. The Australian Unity CALD Alliance Advisory Group initiated and supported the project as mentors, and was critical to its success.

Project model

- A project advisory committee met quarterly to receive reports and provide input into the ongoing development and delivery of the project. The committee included six representatives from the Australian Unity CALD Alliance Advisory Group, a community representative from each language group, and a representative from the Department of Health and Human Services
- An educational consultant was appointed to co-design training resources with bilingual community educators (BCEs) and the Project Advisory Committee.
- BCEs were recruited and trained.
- BCEs provided outreach to seniors in their respective communities to raise awareness of the Victorian Seniors Card and other relevant senior social supports.

Budget

Total project cost including evaluation	\$100,000
--	------------------

Project challenges

- The Seniors Card application process is complex and a major barrier to participation for CALD seniors with low literacy. A more streamlined process would increase engagement of CALD seniors from emerging communities.
- The most effective way to deliver community education incorporates word-of-mouth and face-to-face sharing of information in community languages, with learning through practical demonstration and real-life activities (for example, travelling as a group on public transport).

- Given CALD seniors' language and literacy support needs and the current card acquisition processes, a minimum of two to three sessions per individual/small group is needed to deliver meaningful and practical seniors' education.
- An ideal delivery model would incorporate education within regular seniors' support group meetings over a few months (see the Afghani women's group case study).
- A number of strategies assisted in successful recruitment for, and delivery of, the community education, including:
 - planning for a minimum of two sessions per person to enable registration for the Seniors Card and then education on how to use the card and access other seniors' benefits and services. A combination of larger group, small group and individual interaction can work well
 - allowing plenty of time for the process of signing up for the Seniors Card, as low digital literacy, limited access to computers and other documentation issues slow down the process significantly
 - using familiar local community spaces or people's homes as venues, even though these usually lack technology support
 - providing transport assistance to venues and catering to maximise access and social interactions
 - recruiting participants through established seniors' groups and meetings (for example, religious or activity groups), or a smaller-sized group of friends/acquaintances.

Project outcomes

The project outcomes included:

- the recruitment and training of 20 BCEs across the six communities
- more than 600 seniors received information, and all eligible participants were supported to apply for Seniors Cards. In the three largest communities (Filipinos, Afghani and Burmese), on average there were 160 participants per community group. In contrast, the three Horn of Africa communities (Ethiopian, Somali and Sudanese) had lower numbers of 60+ community members, and averaged 35 participants per community. However, proportionate to the number of seniors within a community, the highest participation rate was for the Afghani and Sudanese (both over 20 per cent) and the lowest was for the Filipino community (2.4 per cent)
- development of culturally and linguistically appropriate training and information resources
- Victorian Seniors Card video translated into seven languages to build awareness of the Victorian Seniors Card and its benefits to older people in culturally and diverse emerging communities.

Resources:

Dari <https://www.youtube.com/embed/qWDssrbX-q4>

Dinka https://www.youtube.com/embed/_Wf_LG1K5H4

Somali <https://www.youtube.com/embed/7zi34UyBIh0>

Amharic <https://www.youtube.com/embed/DDhwtqlq33E>

Karen <https://www.youtube.com/embed/KNUvWkDOsmU>

Chin <https://www.youtube.com/embed/DIITNpRodxU>

Filipino <https://www.youtube.com/embed/MGFaqKpltbU>

English <https://www.youtube.com/embed/4jjIKMcQ11Y>

Project sustainability

Next steps will include wide publication of resources and promotion of their adoption in future CALD community education initiatives through relevant stakeholders such as Ethnic Communities' Council Victoria, COTA Vic, Local Governments and Public Libraries Network.

For more information about this project please contact EBereded-Samuel@australianunity.com.au or visit <https://www.australianunity.com.au/about-us/cald>

Case study – Afghani Senior Women's Group

The Afghan community is one of Victoria's most recently arrived and largest refugee communities, with most having settled in the past 15 years, primarily in Melbourne's South East around Casey and Greater Dandenong. Within the community there is a growing number and proportion of Afghani background people who are 55+ years.

The Afghani Bilingual Community Educators, had prior community development experience within their community. In their BCE roles the approach they adopted was to facilitate a weekly group meeting for senior Afghani women. The group was held for 3 hours over Wednesday lunchtime for 6 months in a local community hall in central Dandenong, close to where most senior Afghani women live.

The group was open to all senior Afghani women and over time attracted a large number of participants, many who attended regularly. The group sessions were designed to be informative, but also welcoming and informal. An important ancillary goal was to foster social connection by incorporating sharing of food, and other enjoyable activities, such as praying, sharing music, crafting, and dancing. The incorporation of prayer into the group meetings reflected a cultural belief that "if you pray together, God will listen to you".

The 'Afghani Senior Women's Group' provided a platform for delivering ongoing community education. The initial focus was on how being a Senior is valued and recognised through access to the Seniors card and Myki, as well as dealing with related topics, such as awareness of rights (e.g. elder abuse, financial abuse), staying healthy and active, accessing other support services and resources. The regular group meeting format enabled the ongoing review and reinforcement of information about seniors benefits, programs and activities, as well as sharing of experiences in using the cards to participate more actively in their local area and beyond.

In discussing their Seniors cards and Mykis, the women in the focus group expressed pride and appreciation for the recognition they have as seniors, and shared their current and future plans for using their cards. They wanted to have more opportunity to access discounts from the shops in their local Dandenong area, such as the chemist, supermarket, and market.

Unfortunately, the group was not able to continue after the conclusion of the project as they were not able to secure funding and access to an appropriate venue – highlighting some of the challenges that less well-established communities face in accessing basic funding to sustain their activities.