

Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

Public Housing COVID-19 Information Program Update

24 July 2020



Multicultural Centre for Women's Health is run by immigrant and refugee women and dedicated to promoting immigrant and refugee women's health.

Project aims

1. To support and encourage residents of public housing estates whose preferred language is a language other than English to take a COVID-19 test.
2. To follow-up with migrant women residents to discuss, and provide information and referral about, any pressing women's health concerns, including mental health, family violence or reproductive health needs.

Project outline

The Multicultural Centre for Women's Health Education Team contacts public housing residents in Victoria via telephone in their preferred language, and share key messages relating to COVID-19, encourage residents to take a test and listen to their women's health concerns, with a view to supporting residents to take appropriate action if needed.

We are grateful for the support of the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services to undertake this work.

Project timelines

Housing Estate	Start
Richmond	Sun 12 July
Carlton	Tue 14 July
Collingwood	Thu 23 July

Project outcomes to date

Telephone calls made as of COB 23 July 2020, across the three sites:

- 1,623 calls made in 19 languages (note: many calls are unanswered for a range of reasons)
- 959 conversations with residents about COVID19, and encouragement to take a test, and if appropriate, about their women's health concerns
- 624 people have agreed to take a test
- 78 people have requested an in-home test (contact details forwarded onto the relevant DHHS officer).

Challenges and strategies

Challenges	Strategies addressing challenges
Disconnected or incorrect telephone numbers: Health educators reported finding that the person they were calling for has passed away or no longer lived at the address.	Inform DHHS of any wrong numbers or disconnections, so that they can update their records.
Residents not picking up calls: Many calls have not been answered. Health educators have suggested that some people will not answer calls without a caller ID.	Educators leave messages when possible and call each number up to three times. The team has noted that door-to-door strategies are also being implemented by other community services in complement with our project.
Mixed responses and mistrust: While many residents have been extremely willing to receive information, some of our calls were met with suspicion.	Educators tailor their messages to suit different communities.

Emerging issues and insights

- **Gaps in access to timely health information:** Not all residents were aware of the testing sites available or the operating hours and were thrilled to find out about pop-up testing sites
- **Providing in-language information has made a difference:** In some instances, receiving letters and information about COVID-19 in English caused confusion and anxiety for some residents.
- **Residents expressed a range of fears around testing:** Some residents expressed fears that leaving their home for testing would increase their risk of contracting COVID-19. Other fears expressed by residents included: the pain of testing, leaving the house alone (without a family member), letting people inside their home (when offered home testing).
- **Some residents expressed confusion about testing:** Some people felt they shouldn't or couldn't get tested if asymptomatic or leave their homes for testing at the same time as a family unit. Some believed that taking their temperature daily was an adequate replacement for testing.
- **Test results delivered in English:** Some residents received their test results in English-language texts that they could not read, which caused significant concern.
- **Support and information following a positive result:** A number of residents had family members with positive COVID-19 results and required information about how to isolate in small homes, and they needed support with essential grocery items. These requests were passed onto DHHS for follow-up with residents.

For more information

For more information, please contact Dr. Adele Murdolo, Executive Director, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, [REDACTED]