NSW Refugee Health Service (RHS) wins a second award for the Healthy Mouth - Something to Smile About Multilingual DVD: South Western Sydney Local Health District has given a Quality Award (Keeping People Healthy category) to RHS and its project partners, the NSW Centre for Oral Health Strategy and SWLHD Oral Health Service.

Evaluation of RHS’ Refugee Health Nurse Program: All stakeholders are invited to take part in an online survey about our nurse-led health assessment program. Please complete the survey by 20 November; it takes 5-15 minutes.

An update on changes to the humanitarian program and its impact on health is the topic of this month’s NSW Refugee Health Improvement Network. Guest speakers include Lucy Morgan (Refugee Council), and Pearl Fernandes (STARTTS) - author of ‘Burning in the fire’—the continuing saga: An analysis of group work with TPV holders in NSW (2002). Tues 26 November, 9.30am, Anglicare Parramatta. RSVP: Convenor.

Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) re-introduced: TPV status has been shown to be associated with anxiety, depression and PTSD (Momartin et al, 2006), and a pattern of growing mental distress, ongoing resettlement difficulties, social isolation, and difficulty in the acculturation process (Steel et al, 2011). A Policy Brief on the TPV is available from the Refugee Council of Australia.

Portfolio changes since the federal election: the Dept. of Immigration & Citizenship has become the Dept. of Immigration & Border Protection (DIBP), under the Minister Scott Morrison. Responsibility for settlement services and multicultural affairs has been moved to the Dept. of Social Services under Minister Kevin Andrews. DIBP will retain responsibility for the care of unaccompanied refugee and asylum seeker minors, with settlement support moving to the Dept. of Social Services once they turn 18.

Increase of Medicare ineligible asylum seekers: A number of asylum seekers’ Bridging Visa Es have been allowed to lapse recently and with this, their Medicare eligibility. Services are advised that this group is eligible for a fee waiver for some public health services in NSW (see NSW Health Policy Doc No: PD2009_068). Other options include the Asylum Seekers Assistance Scheme (Red Cross or Settlement Services International), which can provide assistance with financial costs, RHS’ GP clinics, and the Asylum Seekers Centre’s health clinic. STARTTS, chest clinics, and sexual health clinics do not require a Medicare card.
Evidence-based review into existing models of primary health care for refugees: Coordinated Primary Health Care for Refugees: A Best Practice Framework for Australia Refugees report sets out a number of gaps in the health care system regarding primary health care for those of refugee background, and presents recommendations for an enhanced model of care. This research was co-led by Southern Academic Primary Care Research Unit and the Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity (UNSW), with input from RHS and other partners.

Mental Health Professional’s Association raises concerns about health in detention in PNG: the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, Royal Australian & NZ College of Psychiatrists, Royal Australian College of GPs, and Australian Psychological Society’s recent media release raises a range of health and mental health concerns.

Australian Human Rights Commission comment on detention health: A snapshot report on Asylum seekers, Refugees and Human Rights has been released which includes the mental health impacts of detention within Australia and offshore.

Refugee Council of Australia’s consultations: Your views will form part of RCOA’s annual submission on the 2014/2015 Refugee and Humanitarian Program. Consultations are being held throughout November. See RCOA for dates and venues.

Interview participants sought for ethical health care research: A/Prof Deborah Zion and Prof Louise Newman are researching the ethics of health care provision for asylum seekers held offshore. They wish to interview health and social care providers about their experiences in the field. Contact Prof Zion.

Stories about women’s experiences of Pap tests: Family Planning NSW is wanting to interview women from Iraq, Cambodia, Syria, Burma, Afghanistan, China, and India. They don’t need to have had a Pap test before. Contact Kath Bennett details.

Congratulations to Dr Cynthia Maung, winner of this year’s Sydney Peace Prize. Dr Maung is founder of the Mae Tao Clinic, a health service for refugees living along the Thai-Burmese border - a clinic that receives between 400-500 people per day.

New resources

Refugee Cultural Profiles available online: read about the culture and history of Myanmar, Bhutan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iran and Iraq developed by the Refugee Health Vancouver.

Health Profiles for local communities in South Western Sydney Local Health District (LHD) are available for Bankstown, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly. Health snapshots are available for Bankstown, Camden, Campbelltown, Fairfield, Liverpool, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly.

Interagency directory for NSW multicultural organisations: The Ethnic Communities’ Council of NSW has produced a 47-page Interagency Directory with over 400 entries for multicultural, youth and local council organisations.

Translated factsheets on Vitamin D, Calcium and Iron: RHS has facilitated the translation of Refugee Health Collaborative (NZ) factsheets into additional refugee-relevant languages with funding from Western Sydney Medicare Local. See http://www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/refugee/mhr.html.
Translated oral health factsheets: How to keep your Teeth Healthy was produced by RHS and the Centre for Oral Health Strategy with funding from Western Sydney Medicare Local. See http://www.swslhd.nsw.gov.au/refugee/mhr.html.

Report on health and well-being of Asylum Seekers: St Vincent’s Health Australia, the University of Melbourne, and the Ecumenical Migration Centre and the Brotherhood of St Laurence has published The Asylum Seeker Health and Wellbeing Scoping Study on the health and wellbeing of asylum seekers living in the community, focusing on NSW, Victoria, and Queensland.

New website for health professionals working with refugee children (Canada). It includes information on assessments and screenings, medical conditions, mental health, and culturally competent care.

Best practice guide to responding to refugees with trauma backgrounds: The Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse practice monograph provides pointers for practitioners responding to domestic and family violence, sexual assault and settlement services.

Role of Spirituality in the Treatment of Torture Survivors guide discusses spirituality as a protective factor and strength for torture survivors as well as the importance of spirituality in torture rehabilitation. Developed by the Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services (US).

Free online course on mental health: Flinders University is offering a self-directed, open course to build awareness and understanding about mental health issues both locally and globally. The course seeks to bring a wide range of people together from across the globe in a shared conversation about building mental wealth.

STARTTS Hints for Healing Autumn edition 2013 has a body-focus. The on-line magazine includes: The Healing Power Of Body Work – An Interview With Margaret Churton; Biological Interventions In Early Childhood Work With Refugees by Rosemary Signorelli; What is nutritional medicine?; and a case study by Mirjana Askovic.

Publications & research

Links to abstracts are provided where full texts are not available for free.


Training & professional development

18 Nov 2013: Nutrition and Psychological Well-being: An Integral Part of Clinical Interventions (clinical evening), 6-8pm. Free to attend in person or $5.99 live internet broadcast; STARTTS, Carramar.


22 Nov 2013: Clinical Approaches in the Treatment of Refugee Child and Adolescent Survivors of Torture and Trauma (1-day workshop) $149/$99. STARTTS, Carramar.

29 Nov 2013: Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Network annual symposium From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World, 10.00 am. Canley Vale, Sydney. Contact Immigrant Women’s Health Service on 9726 4044 for details.

5 Dec 2013: Addressing Elder Abuse in CALD Communities Forum, Fairfield City Council. Contact: Yvonne.

6 Dec 2013: STARTTS 25th Anniversary, Free but registration is essential. 10:00am for 10:30am, to RSVP or for further information contact STARTTS via 25years@startts.org.au.


If you have a health-related refugee item for the next Refugee Health E-news please contact: NSW Refugee Health Service (02) 8778 0770 or Cathy.Preston-Thomas@sswhs.nsw.gov.au.