

## Cultural capability critical to population wellbeing

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Speakers at the University of Auckland's 6<sup>th</sup> International Asian and Ethnic Minority Health Conference on 6 and 7 September have advocated for greater cultural competency in delivering health services for New Zealand's increasingly diverse population.

Opening the two-day conference Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector **Hon Jo Goodhew** noted the importance of building capacity within communities to lead their own wellbeing initiatives.

Keynote speaker Mai Chen, Adjunct Professor at University of Auckland and founder of the Superdiversity Centre for Law, Policy and Business, said it was important to undertake a systematic analysis of how superdiversity affected health issues and solutions.

Ethnic minorities and Maori make up almost half of Auckland's current population and half of NZ's population will identify as Asian, Maori and Pacific according to Statistics NZ's 2038 projections. They are becoming a majority of the population and their needs and issues need to be dealt with as part of mainstream health delivery.

Needed actions include building cultural capability, ensuring their workforce reflects the many different cultures they serve, and data collection and adequate monitoring of ethnicities and ethnic health outcomes.

With access to health care and health service utilisation low among many migrant communities, she called for more culturally appropriate resources and services, and communications in different languages, particularly in the areas of mental health, sexual health, aged care and respite.

The opening day of the conference also marked the launch of New Zealand's first resource for maternal health providers working with migrant and refugee women from Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (MELAA) backgrounds.

Launching the resource, eCALD<sup>®</sup> Services national programme manager **Sue Lim QSM** said "One quarter of all births in Auckland are to Asian, Middle Eastern and African women. Becoming a mother in an adopted land presents its own challenges with language barriers and a lack of family and community support often compounding the sense of isolation experienced by new mothers."

"This resource is designed to provide maternal health providers with guidance and essential culture-specific knowledge, assessment tools and culturally appropriate approaches to work with women from Asian, Middle Eastern and African backgrounds. It also provides communication tips and information about traditional practices in pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period common to Chinese, Indian, Korean, Filipino, Japanese, Vietnamese, Myanmar, Muslim and Sikh women."

In addition to sessions on maternal health and perinatal maternal mental health, the conference also featured presentations on the health and wellbeing of older people; primary health and community care; and cultural competency and workforce development.

Two current studies by University of Auckland researchers into the health and wellbeing of older migrants in New Zealand also highlighted the need for more culturally appropriate services and resources.

Discussing an international study exploring 'meaningful engagement' for older people with dementia from diverse cultural and language backgrounds, **Dr Gary Cheung**, Old Age Psychiatrist and Senior

Lecturer at the University of Auckland, emphasised the importance of residential care staff who speak residents' own language and/or are aware of residents' culture and specific needs.

Conference co-convenor **Associate Professor Elsie Ho**, Director of the Centre for Asian and Ethnic Minority Health Research, presented findings from her research into migration, health and wellbeing of older Asian people in New Zealand, in particular examining housing as an important social determinant of the health and wellbeing of older people.

Her research seeks to identify key factors in ageing well in a new country. "Community participation and connections are very important for older migrants, and it is important that we develop services that optimise older people's social engagement, particularly where close family members may live overseas," she said.

The conference concluded with presentations examining the cultural diversity and capability of New Zealand's current health workforce, and whether this matches the diversity of the population.

Commenting on New Zealand's superdiversity, particularly in Auckland where almost 50 per cent of the population is Māori, Pacific, Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African, 44 per cent of the region's population were not born in New Zealand, and over 160 languages are spoken, Sue Lim of eCALD<sup>®</sup> Services emphasised the need to prepare the workforce to be culturally competent, not only within a clinical context but also collegially within a culturally diverse workplace.

In her presentation about New Zealand's multicultural nursing workforce, **Dr Léonie Walker**, Principal Researcher, New Zealand Nursing Organisation, warned that despite increasing numbers of younger internationally qualified nurses (IQN), a nursing shortage may not be averted as many IQN are loathe to commit to staying in New Zealand citing discrimination, management issues, and low pay or progression relative to experience.

Dr Walker noted that not only does that have a huge impact on the health of our workforce, but also on the health of our population. "New Zealand needs IQN nurses, particularly Asian. In Auckland we particularly need a nursing population that matches our residential population," she said. "If we don't make them welcome, if we don't value and protect them, they will go elsewhere."

Organised by the University of Auckland's Centre for Asian and Ethnic Minority Health Research and eCALD<sup>®</sup> Services, the conference drew more than 180 participants from central and local government, health service providers, universities and community organisations from across the country.