

Supporting the Mental Health of Diverse Communities

A large proportion of people in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities struggle to access mental health services. Several services across Western Sydney are hoping to address this by offering support and empowerment where it's needed most.

Western Sydney is extremely fortunate to be one of the most multicultural regions in Australia, with many different nationalities calling it home. Over half of the Western Sydney population was born outside of Australia, much higher than the NSW average of 35%.

With 1 in 5 people across Australia experiencing a mental health problem each year, many people in CALD communities find it difficult to seek support due to language barriers, cultural stigma or socio-economic factors. This often prevents people from seeking support.

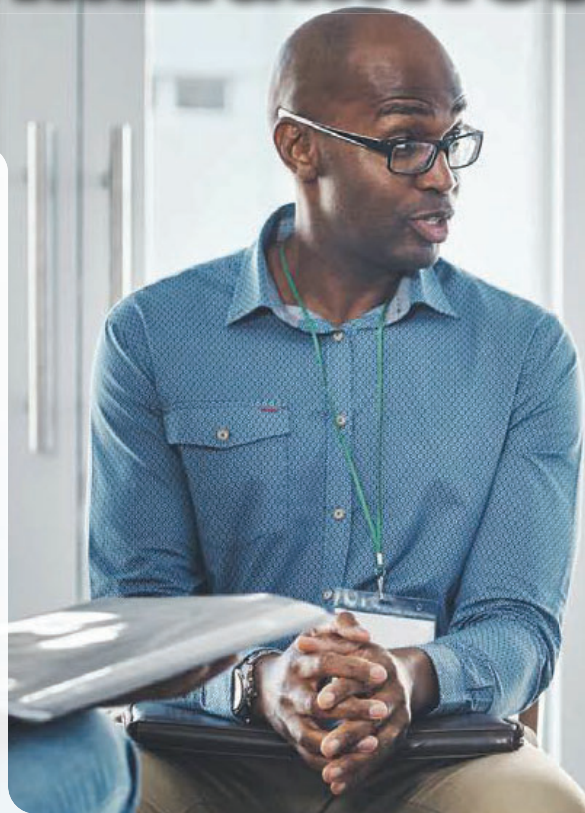
Mental Health Literacy and Suicide Prevention

The NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS) is a non-profit organisation supporting refugees, migrants and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Western Sydney Primary Health Network, operated by WentWest, has worked with STARTTS since 2015 to provide culturally-appropriate mental health literacy and suicide prevention programs for refugees and other diverse communities.

Almost 93% of STARTTS clients were born outside of Australia, and 75% speak a language other than English. Through group sessions, counselling, mental health events, training and awareness days, STARTTS empowers community members to recognise signs of distress, employ coping mechanisms, build supportive community networks, and reduce the stigma around mental health.

LGBTQIA+ Refugee Wellbeing

Western Sydney Primary Health Network has also supported a new STARTTS program delivering wellbeing interventions to refugees who identify as LGBTQIA+.



The program empowers community members and leaders to reduce stigma, recognise signs of distress, develop coping strategies, and build supportive relationships to reduce social isolation.

This is the largest and most comprehensive project nationally that focuses specifically on LGBTQIA+ people from refugee backgrounds. Through the support groups, LGBTQIA+ participants have an opportunity to discuss issues such as loneliness and stress, immigration, health, employment, education and relationships.

Bilingual Hospital 2 Home Program

The Bilingual Hospital 2 Home program is run by One Door Mental Health and helps people connect to the support they need to live well in the community, improve their health outcomes, reduce isolation and prevent re-admission to hospital.

This program strengthens connections between CALD residents in Western Sydney, health professionals, and community services. With a diverse team of bilingual mental health workers, the program helps community members to navigate the mental health system and provides them with emotional support.

Find out more at wentwest.com.au/population-health



Case Study

Aidah's Story

For Syrian refugee, Aidah*, leaving her family in Syria to move to Australia was heartbreaking. She found herself alone in a country she knew very little about and her mental health began to deteriorate. However, after discovering the STARTTS community, she found support and new friends and interests.

"I passed through a very, very hard time, and I was always crying because I'm far away from my children. I didn't know where to go. Everything was difficult when I first came, but when I came to STARTTS, they started to talk to me, to calm me down. And they helped me," says Aidah.

STARTTS was able to support Aidah find opportunities to study and work. She is now studying a Certificate IV in Community Services and has also completed a barista course. STARTTS have also offered her a greater sense of wellbeing and stress management through yoga courses.

"In the STARTTS community, I started to realise more and more that I am in a beautiful country. That they will help me. They will keep me going and help me be involved in the community and meet more people. To find a job, to study," says Aidah.

**This story has been written with consent to publish their real name.*

Signs of Mental Health Distress

- ✓ Excessive paranoia, worry, or anxiety
- ✓ Long-lasting sadness or irritability
- ✓ Extreme changes in moods
- ✓ Social withdrawal
- ✓ Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping patterns

If you or someone you know are showing these signs, please reach out to your GP or a medical professional for support.