

Improving interpreter services for CALD communities

Metro North Hospital and Health Service has recently undertaken a review of its interpreter services to cater to the needs of an increasing number of people who speak a language other than English at home.

This review has indicated improvements that can be made to interpreter services, and also to a range of other factors that we need to consider to improve access and care for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

The 2011 Census showed that 10 per cent, or 83,142, of residents in the Metro North catchment spoke a language other than English at home. The Census also indicated there was significant diversity, with inner city localities showing higher than average percentages of people born overseas and speaking other languages at home. Nundah and surrounding suburbs had the highest proportion of residents (17 per cent, or 17,314 persons) who speak a language other than English as their first language. Toowong recorded the greatest number of residents who speak a language other than English at home (19,679 persons or 14 per cent). The high proportion of residents born elsewhere in Nundah may also reflect refugee settlement patterns. Approximately 44 per cent or 245 clients from the Multicultural Development Association's refugee settlement programs are based in Nundah.*

Anna Voloschenko, a member of the Community Board Advisory Group (CBAG) and an advocate for people from CALD communities said all migrants and refugees from CALD backgrounds bring with them a variety of skills, multicultural values, traditions and attitudes, as well as knowledge and definitions of health, health care and ageing needs.

“These can differ significantly from those in the broader Australian community,” Anna said.

“Language and health literacy are critical skills that can impact CALD people's access to services, communication with health professionals and eventual outcome of the health condition that they have.

“Engagement of the interpreter is often very beneficial but can be challenging at times. For example, if the interpreter belongs to the same cultural or social group as the patient, some patients may refuse to disclose important information for fear that such information will be passed on to the rest of the community. “

Anna said another important factor in engaging an interpreter is the age and gender of the interpreter.

“Female patients are unlikely to communicate with a male interpreter and a male patient will prefer to discuss health matters in the presence of male interpreter,” she said.

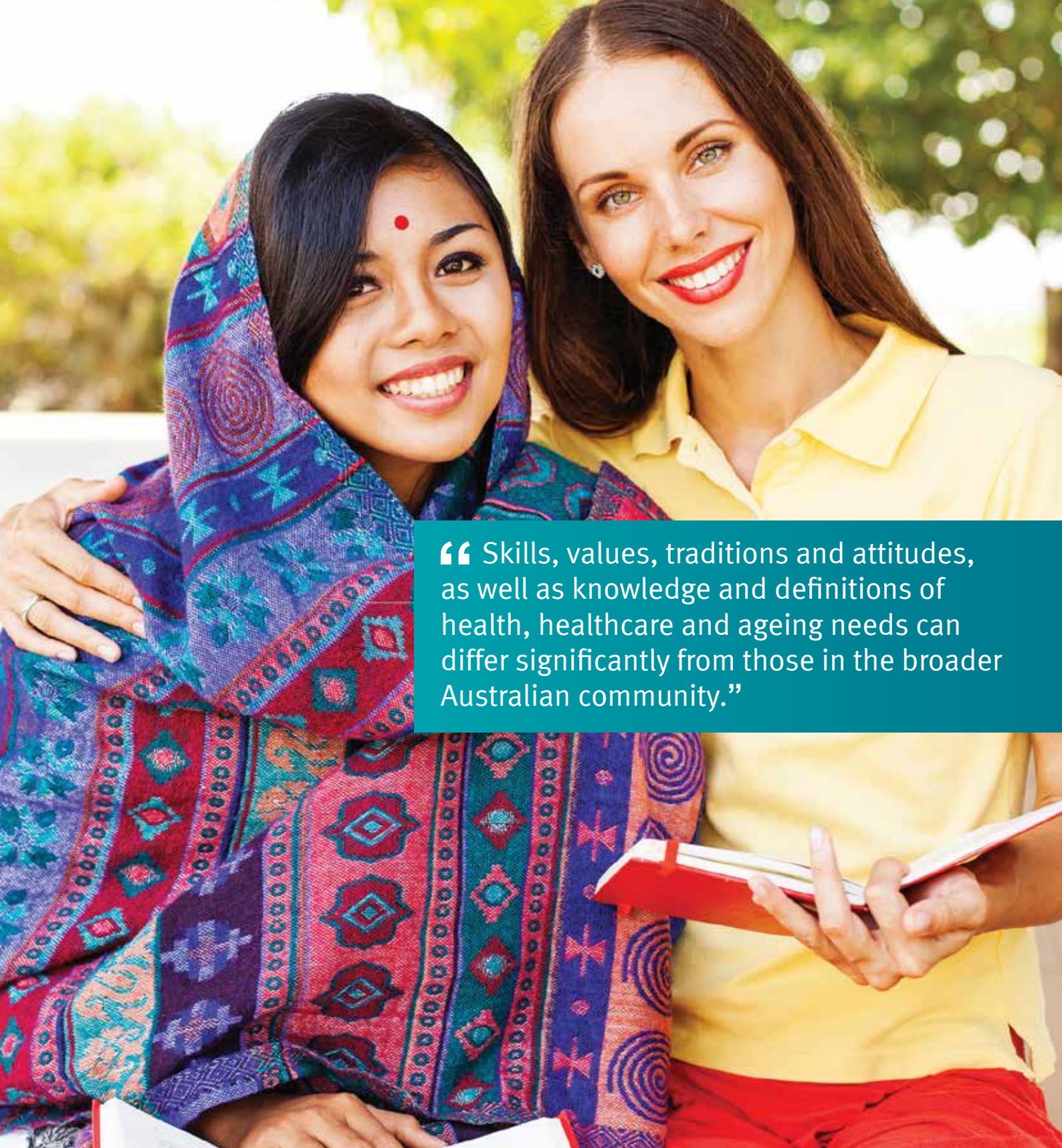
“Furthermore, the skills and health literacy of interpreters can vary and this can impact upon the experience of patients who need an interpreter.”

Metro North is committed to improving by engaging with CALD to enhance access to services and improve the quality of care they receive.

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Sourced from Population Health Report 2013/14 compiled by Elliott Whiteing Pty Ltd for Metro North Brisbane Medicare Local.

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