

Case study

Supporting multicultural patients in north-west Tasmania

Southside Family Medical

Southside Family Medical is a general practice in South Burnie.

The practice serves a significant number of patients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, including skilled and seasonal workers and their families, students, and tourists.

According to the Burnie City Council, more than 23 languages are reportedly spoken at home in the Burnie local government area, including Mandarin, Nepali, Punjabi, Arabic, and Sinhalese.

A diverse population brings opportunities for the community with new skills and ideas. However, there is also a need to ensure health services are equipped to provide culturally appropriate health care that meets the needs of the population.

The practice has nine GPs, including eight who, in addition to English, speak and consult in 17 other languages. These languages include:

- Ndebele, Zulu, Shona and Xhosa (1 GP)
- French, Italian and German (1 GP)
- Cantonese and Mandarin (1 GP)
- Sinhala and Tamil (2 GPs)
- Urdu, Pushtu and Punjabi (1 GP)
- Farsi/Persian (2 GPs)
- Turkish (1 GP, who is also one of the GPs who speaks Farsi/Persian).



Working with patients when there are language barriers

The practice has started recording patients' country of birth and preferred language. This information may assist GPs in making a diagnosis, deciding whether an interpreter may be required, or recommending a GP who speaks the same language. Sometimes Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) interpreters are not available at short notice for all languages and so this is an important step in addressing this challenge.

Practice manager Senzeni Bulle says:

"We need to be open to learning on the fly with each presenting situation as pain and healing thresholds may be quite different ... and to be aware of possible cultural issues whose different interpretations may impede healing and recovery."

"We promote the online training on TIS National and how to access it using the resources on the TIS National website. We are also looking at having a translated after-hours recorded message which can be available in key languages, with information on how to make an appointment or access after-hours care."

What changes has the practice made?

The practice has made several changes that were championed by practice staff in response to seeing an increase in multicultural Tasmanian patients. This includes:

- updating the online booking form to include country of birth and preferred language
- creating a fact sheet outlining why questions about language and country of birth are asked
- training staff on addressing questions relating to country of birth and preferred language
- ensuring all team members have a TIS National code and are aware of how to access the service
- investigating training for team members in cultural competence
- being a member of the Primary Health Tasmania Multicultural Health Access Program Technical Working Group.

What is the practice's message for other clinics?

Senzeni Bulle says:

"There is often a need for more patience and effort as it may take time to get the message across and to build the necessary trust or help navigate the health system. It is a very rewarding experience given the difference made as the wider community tends to benefit."

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