

Mental health services for immigrant communities: How are we doing?

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The Australian mental health system has been in a process of continuous reform over the past 20 years. We are now in for another phase of major system reform, with the more direct entry of the Commonwealth government into the business of health service delivery. Although major changes have been wrought in the structure and operations of mental health services, and there is much more to come, the level of improvement in accessibility and quality of treatment and care has been substantially below the expectations of service users and the community in general. Even though cultural and linguistic diversity is a core feature of the Australian population an area in which progress has been particularly disappointing has been in the provision of culturally appropriate, acceptable and effective mental health services to immigrant communities. This has been despite consistent research evidence of under-utilisation of services and other markers of system failure, and despite endless reference to provision of culturally appropriate services in mental health legislation, policy documents and service standards. This paper will seek to make some comment on the basic changes in thinking and approach that will need to occur if we genuinely wish to provide effective, accessible and acceptable mental health services to all Australian residents.