

# 2016-17 State Budget: Refugee and asylum seeker health and wellbeing in Victoria

## Summary

### Background

The Victorian Government is committed to welcoming Victoria's newest arrivals and helping make a difference to the lives of people from refugee backgrounds, including those currently seeking asylum.

The number of people from refugee backgrounds in Victoria will grow as Victoria welcomes more people seeking refuge from the Syrian conflict over the next few years. In addition to Victoria's general Humanitarian Programme intake of around 4,000 refugees per year, Victoria anticipates settling up to 4,000 additional Syrian and Iraqi refugees, with intake now increasing steadily.

People from refugee backgrounds show immense courage and resilience to rebuild their lives in a new country. Victoria's health and human service providers have a vital role to play in helping to restore wellbeing, empower communities and treat people who have survived torture, trauma and human rights violations with dignity, compassion and respect.

### New investment

*The 2016-17 Victorian State Budget invests an additional \$10.9 million over four years for health and human services for people from refugee backgrounds. This additional investment is in response to growing Syrian and Iraqi refugee settlement in Victoria.*

This investment will build on existing state efforts of around \$11 million per year in targeted supports to improve long-term health and wellbeing outcomes and support successful transition to community life. It complements broader 2016-17 State Budget funding for culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Commonwealth settlement services supports.

Funding will be allocated predominantly to health and human services in the north and north-west metropolitan area, as this is where the majority of new Syrian and Iraqi refugees are anticipated to settle. As well as addressing demand pressures, this initiative will support delivery of innovative and collaborative sector-led models that address complex issues in sustainable and integrated way.

### Budget initiative components

#### 1. New orientation, triage and referral model for the Refugee Health Program

The 2016-17 State Budget invests \$1.7 million over four years for the Refugee Health Program. The funding will deliver a new orientation, triage and referral model for newly arrived people from refugee backgrounds in the north and north-west metropolitan region. Three experienced refugee health nurses (with attached language services support) will be employed at Dianella Health, Plenty Valley Community Health and ISIS Primary Care to provide orientation, triage and referral services for newly arrived refugees at the Dallas and Sunshine Offices of Victoria's key refugee settlement services provider, AMES Australia.

The nurses will provide an important link between Refugee Health Programs delivered by community health services, AMES Australia settlement services and broader referral to health and human services.

## 2. New paediatric position for the Refugee Health Fellows Program

Over the next two years, a new part-time paediatric specialist will hold regular clinics for refugee families across the northern metropolitan area. This position will be managed by the Royal Children's Hospital through their Refugee Health Fellows Program, but linked with Northern Health and community settings in the northern metropolitan area.

## 3. New immunisation program for people from refugee backgrounds

A \$2.3 million catch-up immunisation program will improve immunisation coverage for infants, children, adolescents and adults from refugee backgrounds. This program will triage individuals' immunisation requirements and create comprehensive catch-up immunisation schedules. It will include the identification and tracking of all individuals' records to ensure catch-up immunisation schedules are completed.

The program will pilot delivery models of adult immunisation services and relevant outreach services via existing community health services and local government authorities in the north and north-west metropolitan areas of Melbourne. The services will also be linked with the new settlement health coordinator positions via a referral process. Project support, coordination, training and evaluation will be through the existing Immunisation Working Group convened by the Victorian Refugee Health Network.

## 4. Boost to language services capacity in health and human services

The 2016-17 State Budget will provide \$1.68 million over four years to meet the communication needs of increased refugee settlement, including:

- \$1.06 million over four years for targeted allocations for supplementary interpreting in mainstream services in areas of high demand and enhanced translated resources
- \$623,000 over four years for a new grants program that will support innovative strategies for improving language services engagement in metropolitan and regional Victorian hospitals for people from refugee backgrounds. There will be six two year projects in total over the four year period funded up to \$90,000 per project. The Victorian Refugee Health Network will provide ongoing project support.

## 5. New mental health and psychosocial support programs

As part of the package, \$2.7 million in funding over four years will help provide newly arrived people from refugee backgrounds access to culturally responsive and trauma-informed mental health and psychosocial support. The program will comprise new supported referral and capacity building initiatives outlined below:

- \$2 million to facilitate supported referral for refugee children and young people at-risk of serious mental health disorders, designed in partnership with public mental health services and key Non-Government Organisations.
- \$500,000 over four years for Foundation House to establish a new community mental health promotion and mental health first aid training program. This will build community resilience and an early response to problems.
- \$215,000 over four years for Foundation House to establish a Community of Practice in child and youth refugee mental health through professional development and capacity building
- \$60,000 in funding in 2016-17 to assist HealthWest Primary Care Partnership and University of Melbourne to set-up a new collaborative mental health research project with young people from refugee backgrounds.

## 6. Boost to child and family services for people from refugee backgrounds

As part of the 2016-17 State Budget, \$2.23 million in funding over four years will provide targeted child and family services support for unaccompanied refugee children and young people, through the Refugee Minor Program. The expansion will also support broader capacity building of culturally responsive child, youth and family services.

The Refugee Minor Program is an existing state-wide service administered directly by the department to assist children and young people with their settlement and establishment into life in their new community.

## More information

For more information about this topic please email [diversity@dhhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:diversity@dhhs.vic.gov.au) or call Crystal Russell, at the Department of Health and Human Services, on 03 9096 1009.

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