

## **Beyond Education – The Diverse Roles of Bilingual Community Health Workers**

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**Background:** Australia is an increasingly multicultural society. The 2021 Census shows that 29.3% of all Australians were born overseas, with more than half of the population having a parent born overseas. However, the overseas born populations are disproportionately affected by chronic hepatitis B (CHB), with about 70% of people living with CHB having been born overseas. Many of whom come from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and face multiple challenges in accessing health information and care.

**Argument:** It is widely acknowledged that trained bilingual community health workers (BCHWs) or peers play a pivotal role in breaking down critical language barriers, enabling effective communication in education. However, their contributions extend far beyond mere education. They act as navigators, advocates, promoters, facilitators, supporters, assistants, and sources of comfort. These BCHWs engage with not only individuals but also families and wider communities. Their effectiveness stems from the trust they have cultivated within affected communities over time and the quality of their work, not only shared language and experience.

**Results:** Annually, around 50 education sessions are conducted by BCHWs engaging over 650 participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. We support about 80 people living with hepatitis B and provide information directly to around 600 individuals across the state. We reach many more people statewide through social, ethnic media, and other activities to raise awareness. Our primary focus area, Brisbane South, which has the highest hepatitis B prevalence in Queensland, has achieved the highest hepatitis B care uptake in Queensland.

**Applications:** In addition to education, BCHWs play multiple roles in raising awareness in their communities and supporting people living with hepatitis B due to shared language and life experiences.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement:** No