

Adolescent-friendly health services for refugees resettling in Western Australia

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Background:

Adolescent refugees and asylum seekers (AS) resettling in Australia have experienced multiple adversities (e.g., violence, family death/separation, immigration detention), and have broader medical and psychosocial issues that can hinder successful resettlement. Traditional healthcare services and policies are largely targeted towards "paediatric" or "adult" cohorts with minimal focus on adolescent-specific care to comprehensively address their unique healthcare needs.

Approach:

The Perth Children's Hospital (PCH) Refugee Health Service (RHS) is the state tertiary health provider for child and adolescent refugees and AS. In April 2023, a RHS adolescent-friendly program which integrates research initiatives was developed and implemented. The program strengthens multidisciplinary healthcare, enables screening and management of psychosocial issues and health risk behaviours, provides health promotion and reinforces community linkages for adolescents.

Outcome:

A fortnightly multidisciplinary Adolescent Refugee clinic is led by an Adolescent and Young Adult Physician, embedded in a multidisciplinary team (General Paediatricians, Refugee Nurses, Psychologists, Neurosciences team, Allied Health, school liaison teacher and interpreters). An electronic psychosocial screening tool (eHEADSSS) was culturally modified and translated (18 languages) complementing existing adolescent-friendly initiatives (e.g., independent consultations). Gender and language-specific sexual health education packages were developed and are being provided in group sessions. Strengthened collaborations and streamlined referral to community providers have resulted in improved community support for adolescents. Several research projects are in various stages of planning and implementation to monitor outputs and guide further research and practice.

Innovation and Significance:

This innovative multidisciplinary adolescent program is the first and only service within Australia providing dedicated tertiary-level adolescent-friendly services for resettling refugees addressing their holistic needs. It is evidence-based, designed based on findings from previous RHS Adolescent research reflecting translation of findings into clinical practice. Closing health knowledge gaps (e.g. reproductive and sexual health) and cultural modification of electronic adolescent screening has translation potential to other broader refugee health services.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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