

Political parties ignore migrants in health agendas

An alliance of the nation's leading multicultural services says that recent health announcements by both the ALP and the Liberal Party have simply ignored multicultural Australia.

The alliance was formed at the Diversity in Health 2010 Conference in June. It comprises FECCA, the Centre for Culture, Ethnicity & Health, the Diversity Health Institute and the Institute for Cultural Diversity.

Mr Pino Migliorino, Chair of FECCA, said: "So far the discussion on health has focussed on two things only – hospital waiting periods and emergency departments. The discussion on multiculturalism has focussed on two things only – people arriving on boats, and limiting Australia's population.

"This incredibly narrow focus leaves out the fact that we are a multicultural nation *right now*. The health needs of the 45% of voters who were either born overseas or have parents born overseas must be considered."

Mr Migliorino outlined three issues critical to multicultural health: health literacy, aged care and mental health.

A 2006 audit by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that only 40% of all Australians (and 26% of those from non-English-speaking backgrounds) were able to understand basic health information.

"Raising the level of health literacy is the key to reducing unnecessary emergency department admissions and managing the enormous cost and impact of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, respiratory disease and renal conditions."

Aged care is also a critical issue, as post-war migrants account for 23% of Australia's ageing population. The alliance has called for the development of a national policy and strategy to address the needs of this group, including workforce development, language services and strategies to support people in their homes.

Mental health plans, which currently focus heavily on suicide prevention and youth, will also need to specifically address the needs of people from diverse backgrounds.

Mr Migliorino said: “We need to talk about cultural diversity – and the disadvantage that can exist within this diversity – if we’re going to provide better healthcare for all Australians. But so far neither party has been willing to acknowledge this diversity in their plans for our country’s health.”

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* Recommendations from the Diversity in Health 2010 Conference are available at www.diversityinhealth.com.au .