

A HNECC PHN CASE STUDY

Impacting our communities

CARE NAVIGATION PROGRAM

TOPIC

HealthWISE is funded by the HNECC Primary Health Network to deliver a Care Navigation Program to support members of the Ezidi community as part of the Australian Government's regional refugee settlement program. The NSW rural town of Armidale was designated a settlement location for the program.

BACKGROUND

The Ezidi (or Yazidi) are an ancient ethnic minority community who are indigenous to parts of Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Over centuries, the Ezidi people have frequently been the target of persecution, largely due to their exclusive religious and cultural beliefs.

In 2018, around 600 Ezidi refugees from Northern Iraq and surrounding countries arrived in Armidale. The Ezidi people fled persecution in their hometowns from the militant Islamic group ISIS. It was a community that presented with high levels of trauma, grief, depression, injury, ill-health and disability.



CHALLENGE

Prior to arriving in Armidale, most Ezidi refugees had experienced significant trauma under ISIS followed by years in refugee camps across dispersed locations. At the time very few understood English, and many were without literacy in their own language.

With the significant health and wellbeing challenges faced by the Ezidi community, it was essential to establish meaningful engagement to help identify their health goals. Vital too was the need to help the Ezidi people understand Australia's complex health system.

SOLUTION

HealthWISE is a not-for-profit that delivers allied health, primary health care nurses, mental health, Aboriginal health and Small-Town After-Hours services across the region. The PHN chose HealthWISE to pilot a Care Navigation Program specifically for humanitarian entrants with Ezidi ethnicity based in Armidale.

Founded on empowerment principles, the program aims to build capacity, autonomy, and health literacy among community members to achieve optimal health outcomes, timely access to healthcare, and a better understanding of the Australian healthcare system.



IMPACT

Care Navigation was taken from a framework developed for an international cancer care program and adapted to the unique circumstances of the Ezidi people settling into life in Armidale.

The Care Navigation model is considered suitable for people with a refugee background, as they experience multiple difficulties such as a lack of knowledge of health services available, lack of understanding of the Australian healthcare system, and minimal English language skills to effectively communicate their needs.

This can often lead to lost referrals and missed appointments. Consequently, people are not receiving critical healthcare in a timely manner, adding to increasing pressure for treating GP's and specialists.

CEO of the PHN, Richard Nankervis, has been impressed with the problem-solving skills used to empower the community.

"With few of the Ezidi refugees understanding English and many without any literacy in their native language, the Navigator utilises images, translators, and animated videos to help people understand our complex health system."

"From all reports, Armidale has embraced the Ezidi people who are slowly adapting to their new life in Australia, thanks to the generosity of the community and the assistance of the Care Navigation program."

Care Navigator Melissa Van Leeuwen has worked on the ground with the Ezidi people for the past two years and has assisted in the identification of barriers and solutions.

"A Care Navigator assists clients with interpreting and navigating the Australian healthcare system by working with them to manage appointments, obtain referrals onto support groups or other organisations, and increase their health literacy to manage or improve their health outcomes."

"When one of the Ezidi community members is given a script from their GP, they would take it to the pharmacy to be filled, but then not know how to take the medication correctly, as all the instructions are written in English."

"Another example is referrals to specialists. When one of our Ezidi community members were referred to a specialist, they would not know what to do, where to go or how to get there. Most of the Ezidi people do not drive, have a car or licence and would not know how to leave town. A Care Navigator assists by organising travel, accommodation and the overall logistics of getting that person to their appointment which may be in Newcastle, Coffs Harbour or further."

The service started as a 12-month pilot, however, following the success and engagement in Armidale with both the Ezidi community and General Practices, the Care Navigation program has been extended until June 30, 2023.

Image courtesy of HealthWISE