

Key Issues for the Polish Community

Most Polish people in Australia lead a very fulfilling life. Many can speak English, work, study or enjoy their retirement and feel part of the Australian fabric. While maintaining strong links with the Polish community in Australia and their families in Poland, they feel that Australia is their home. The elderly of Polish background however, have a range of un-met needs. Service needs of the Polish community have increased dramatically in recent years as it is one of the most rapidly ageing communities, with the fourth largest number of older people from all ethnic groups in Victoria.

Research and statistical information to date indicate a very low level of usage of support services such as Home and Community Care (HACC) services by Polish people. Above average incidence of cancer and mental health problems is prevalent in Polish elderly. A high number of Polish people live in lone households (42%).

Polish community-specific issues

- fear of authority and reluctance to seek assistance until crisis point is reached;
- cases of social isolation and limited English;
- service system disorientation;
- refusal to accept help due to cultural expectations that the family's role is to provide the necessary support;
- refusal to accept help from outsiders;
- experiencing embarrassment or even shame of having to deal with one's personal problems in public.

Many Polish elderly people can speak and understand English. However, some of them cannot read or write and may have problems with filling out forms. Some of those who say that they can speak English can often understand and respond to simple sentences and situations and are able to express their needs in a limited manner.

Key issues for service providers

- The need for appropriate dementia care support services for the Polish elderly and their carers.
- The need for in-home support services that are culturally and linguistically relevant to potential Polish consumers.
- More strategic focus on the primary importance of carers.
- Work on the eradication of under-utilisation of mainstream services, such as HACC and Residential Care.
- The need for increased support for rural and regional Polish elderly in Victoria.
- The need for culturally appropriate grief and death counseling.

