

National Seniors Australia & Australian Unity
NEW & EMERGING CALD COMMUNITIES SUPPORT TEAM

“COVID-19 VACCINE SENTIMENTS & FEARS”

REPORT 1

Dated 24/2/21

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Ethics Declaration

National Seniors CEO solicited *verbatim* comments through the contacts of the Australia & Australian Unity New and Emerging CALD Communities COVID-19 support team about vaccine sentiments and fears with the intent that the information would be used:

- to inform government on issues and to improve our Community Liaison services (quality improvement); and
- to provide government with marginal groups voice in the planning and roll out of COVID-19 vaccinations but not for general use of this research unless approved as above.

Consequently this research was initiated without formal approval from an NHMRC accredited ethics committee because of the urgency of capturing issues for the attention of government in the vaccination roll-out and for more effective operations of National Seniors Community Liaison Officers in the field.

The research did not have a research question, hypothesis, or a defined research methodology other than collecting text comments. It is in a category similar to patient experience measures which are not considered to be research but a vehicle for quality improvement. The willingness to contribute to stated purpose of the research implied *de facto* or 'opt out' consent for the use of the non-identifiable information.

New and emerging CALD Communities:

COVID vaccine sentiments and fears

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Summary

At this early stage in the vaccination campaign there were key insights from CALD groups.

Bonnyrigg Cambodian Australian Welfare Council:

- The hadn't been much news in Khmer language on the vaccine
- Older people are getting their misinformation from social media all over the world and have concerns about Chinese vaccines and reactions
- They're just waiting their turn for the jab but concerned about when it will be.

Southwest Sydney Multiple Arabic-speaking communities:

- People are concerned about possible side effects
- They are motivated to get vaccinations so they don't have travel restrictions
- Older people just want things to get back to normal and so will get vaccinated.

Victorian Filipino regional communities

- Of 81 people, 65% said 'yes' to be vaccinated, 25% 'no' and 10% 'not sure'
- Community leaders attitudes have a big impact
- Some leaders are not convinced ABOUT getting the vaccine because they had a pre-existing illnesses or they believe misleading information from social media.

Southeast Melbourne Afghan community

- Some view this as just a flu vaccine and have no concerns
- Concerns about side effects and unknown conspiracies
- Welcome the opportunity but concerns about it as a 'new' thing

South American Spanish-speakers Melbourne Western Suburbs

- The community has COVID survivors in their families – this isn't 'a joke'
- There is hesitation from misinformation and scepticism which doctors are addressing
- Majority are ready and willing for the vaccine

Chi-Hakha Burmese/Myanmar West Melbourne community

- Vaccine information has not been shared in either English or Hakha-Chin language.

Professional Southwest Melbourne community

- Multi-cultural professionals, 20 years in Australia have some similar views.

Note: National Seniors Call Centre comments are attached for comparison.

Background

Over the past week, our COVID-19 CALD Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) across NSW and Victoria asked for feedback from community leaders and community members for their thoughts and feelings towards the COVID-19 vaccine. They collected information via phone calls, email and in person meetings. In addition, as leaders of their community they shared their own thoughts and feelings on the vaccine rollout based.

The feedback provided is to give the Department of Health early insights into new CALD communities and how we can better support and inform them through the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.

Sydney CALD Communities

Khmer (Cambodian) Community

Chanthy Lim-Chum, Khmer speaking community, Western Sydney

To assess the feeling of the community, Chanthy and Team Leader, Annette Fenton visited a Khmer Temple in Bonnyrigg Southwest Sydney.

We met with both members of the community and has a meeting with community leaders Thin and Nola.

We also met with local Khmer General Practitioners. Some doctors were too busy to talk, but the receptionists had a lot of enquiries and they were grateful that National Seniors Australia and Australian Unity were providing information and resources in Khmer to help older Cambodian who don't speak or understand English.

Khmer Community Leaders

Office Coordinator for Cambodian Australian Welfare Council (CAWC):

"They are just waiting for their turn for "the jab."

I (NSW Team Leader) contacted the CAWC Office Coordinator to discuss the NSA Covid-19 Support service and asked for his organisations thoughts on the Covid-19 vaccination and how the Cambodian community that he is involved with is feeling. He advised that CAWC is running information sessions in partnership with South West Sydney Area Health Service (SWSAHS) to promote Covid-19 vaccines. He said that most of the elderly community don't have any concerns/problems and "they are just waiting for their turn for "the jab." He said that the information sessions run by South Western Sydney Area Health Service assist in providing correct advice from a health professional.

Director Human Resources for Cambodian Australian Welfare Council (CAWC):

"They are waiting to get back to normal..."

Today CLO Chanthy and I (NSW Team Leader) met with the CAWC Director HR and Service Coordinator at the Cambodian Australian Welfare Council (CAWC) office at Bonnyrigg. The

purpose of the meeting was to discuss how we can work in collaboration to provide Covid-19 advice to the local Cambodian community. Both CAWC representatives were receptive to the information that we provided. They advised us that CAWC is currently running information sessions with SWSAHS for the elderly with topics on Covid-19. They both said that the customers are receptive to the vaccine, as “they are wanting to get back to normal” - most wanting to attend the Australian Unity MRN Khmer Groups that have been on hold since March 2020. Both agreed that the elderly listen to the news from back home and that they have concerns about the Chinese vaccines and the physical reactions. The meeting was informative on both sides and we will continue to network in collaboration with CAWC to promote the NSA Covid-19 Support service.

Group Facilitator for Cambodian Australian Welfare Council (CAWC):

“There hasn't been a lot of news in their language on the vaccine.”

I (NSW Team Leader) contacted the Group Facilitator for the Cambodian Australia Welfare Council and asked for her organisation's thoughts on the Covid-19 vaccination and how the Cambodian community that she is involved with is feeling. She stated that her colleagues are confident with the roll-out and that they trust in the government and the public health advice being provided. In regard to clients 65+ years, she said that “there hasn't been a lot of news in their language (Khmer) on the vaccine” She also said that the elderly repeat the fake news from Cambodia, especially relating to the vaccinations in China which makes them scared about the vaccine.

Receptionist at General Practitioner Clinic in Cabramatta, NSW:

“We have had concerns and questions about the vaccine from the patients and when it will be their turn.”

Thanked me (CLO) for providing NSA Covid-19 Support service information/flyers to their practice directly.

General Practitioner at Private Clinic in Cabramatta, NSW:

“I'm hoping that the concern will ease after a few had their vaccination.”

- The community concerns are around the vaccine's safety and should it be taken it or not.
- *“There is a lot of misinformation on the Covid-19 vaccine – the public watch YouTube from all over the world with wrong information.”*

Arabic Community

Mona Ataya, Arabic speaking community, Western Sydney

From speaking with the community, the main questions and concerns were:

- The local vaccination locations.
- Side effects of the vaccination.
- Support people with fear from the vaccination.
- Support people with confusion about the vaccination.

Arabic Community Leader Feedback

Arabic speaking General Practitioner at Private Practice at Yagoona, NSW:

“So many older people are scared to take the vaccination as they believe that it might kill them.”

- GP stated that some elderly patients think that Covid-19 does not exist.
- The majority of his patients are scared of the side effects from the vaccination according to the GP.

General Practitioner at Private Practice at Yagoona, NSW:

“Many older people need reassuring and counselling about their fear in regard to the possible side effects of the vaccination.”

- GP was contacted by CLO Mona regarding feedback about older people response of Covid-19 vaccination and any concerns or issues in the community.
- GP was supportive of the NSW Covid-19 Support service as it will be beneficial for the CALD groups

Community Leader at Australian Druze Community:

“The publicity and social media plays the biggest part in people's minds...”

“Some of the older people are going to get vaccinated so they don't have any travel restrictions.”

- Community Leader said that they have a social worker who does similar role but they always welcome new methods of resources. He will notify his colleagues about our project and pass on CLO number
- Community Leader said, “the publicity and social media plays the biggest part in people's minds” and that the side effect of the vaccine is highly dangerous and could be deadly.
- Community Leader said that “some of the older people are going to get vaccinated so they don't have any travel restrictions.”

The Islamic Egyptian Society of NSW:

“The majority of people thinking negatively about vaccination and its side-effects.”

- I called contact from The Islamic Egyptian Society of NSW and asked him if there was any current issues or concerns regarding Covid-19 and the vaccination with the Islamic Egyptian Society older group and overall feedback.
- Contact mentioned that people are scared of the vaccination.
- People are scared of travel restrictions if they don't get vaccinated.
- Adding, people think that it's going to be compulsory to get vaccinated against Covid-19 virus.

PARKS Community Network – Arabic & Assyrian Seniors Group

“With the vaccine, the elderly are wanting to get back to normal.”

- The Group Facilitator advised that during the Covid-19 pandemic the changes were overwhelming to the Arabic community, especially with the change of routine.
- “With the vaccine, the elderly are wanting to get back to normal,” she said.

- With the Centre Based Day Care that she facilitates, she said that some of the clients are for the vaccine and some against and there hasn't been enough information in Arabic. She also said that our NSA Covid-19 Support project would be beneficial for her group members, who we will visit this Friday and provide information in Arabic.

Victorian CALD Community Liaisons

Filipino Community

Community Liaison: Jing Sosa, Geelong and regional Victoria

Jing reached out directly to members in his community and asked directly if they are willing to receive the vaccine.

From 81 call responses, 65% said Yes, 25% said No, and 10% Not Sure.

Reason for YES	Reason for NO	Reason for NOT SURE
if advised by GP	don't know the short- and long-term effects	confusing due to mixed messages
for personal and family protection	no sufficient proof of efficacy and safety	Need to talk to the family
to be able to travel overseas	Religious reasons	too early, observe safety and efficacy
if mandatory from at work	Approved in less than a year, vaccine for HIV not yet developed	sceptical and doubtful, more information required

Where are people receiving information on the vaccine

TV, Government websites, family and friends via social media like; Facebook, twitter, Instagram, messenger.

Questions from the community and leaders:

- How was it developed?
- Did they use stem cells or foetus? – this has cultural and religious implications
- How long is its efficacy?
- What will be the effect to person with several pre-existing condition?
Can we choose the vaccine or not?
- What's the difference between the 2 vaccines, Pfizer and AstraZeneca, and what am I getting?

Filipino Leader feedback:

- Leader's attitude has big impact in building confidence through the community.
- Leaders themselves are not 100 % convinced that vaccine is safe, therefore communication with members depend on the confidence being brought about by the leaders.
- Some reasons, leaders have existing illness that creates fear of the unknown. members oftentimes rely on what other people say, and misleading information from social media.

"I can't wait for my turn to have the vaccine. I am a great believer in vaccines and strong faith on the hard work of the government and the scientists across the globe to help end this pandemic. People especially community leaders must access proper source of information to cascade to their members to develop confidence."

Afghan Community**Aisha Mahboob, Southeast Melbourne Victoria**

As a leader of Afghan community and NSA worker would love to do the vaccine as soon as it is available. I have read all the information about benefits of the vaccine and I have been encouraging my community and people from other communities to follow the advice of the health workers and professionals and take the jab.

Australian government has handled this pandemic very well compared to other countries in the world and I trust they will do the right thing with vaccine and will not risk the life of fellow Australians.

Of course, there is concern among the community, everything new will make people conscious and will make them think twice before doing it.

Afghan Leaders Feedback

- *I would love to go for the vaccine both for myself and my family. I think we are blessed for having the opportunity to get the vaccine in Australia.*
- *Being in contact with the community, I get different reactions. Some are excited and happy for getting the vaccine while some are worried and hesitating having the vaccine. The main cause for the hesitation is the side effects and unknown reasons/conspiracy behind the vaccine. Some people are actively trying to pass wrong information to people specially in media such as Facebook putting community in doubt.*

- *Some members of community are more than happy and have welcoming ideas to take the vaccine and view it as normal as the annual flu vaccine. However, we do have members of the community who have the perception that the vaccine will lead to death, sever illness or is some form of government push, which they choose to rebel against.*
- *The topic of COVID-19 vaccination has also become an issue within households as some members are for taking the vaccine and others against. I assume that it is an individual approach in some cases and some people are influence by those around them, such as family or friends. Other leaders were saying that social media must be controlled, people rely on social media a lot now adays.*
- *People are reading different things on different websites and hearing different comments. It makes it hard for people to decide.*

Spanish Speaking Communities

Cecilia Gomez Benitez, Western Suburbs Victoria

I spoke with community leaders and doctors from my community to provide some further insights of the concerns and feelings in the Latino American and Spanish communities in Victoria.

Doctors Latino American and Spanish Community

“Vaccination is the best way to control the pandemic devastation return to almost to a normal life in the world.”

As we all know, since the pandemic began, there have been misinformation, scepticism about the existence of the virus, how severe an infection can be, how to prevent transmission and about the safety of potential vaccine. For this reason, some people are hesitant.

As doctors, they spend a lot of time in their practice explaining to patients why there is no need to wait for more evidence in fact, delaying getting a vaccine could be dangerous. Over 200 million people in the world got the vaccine and have shown safe.

People who are close to vulnerable people must get the vaccine. The majority are ready and willing to take the vaccine.

Latino Central/South American Spanish-speaking Community Leaders

“We have some COVID survivors in the community and they want people to know this is not a joke, “they went through a hell”, two of them have to learnt to walk and speak again, two others have developed cancer.”

There is always going to be a few people who are a bit cautious, and they are understandably wanting to learn more about the vaccine before they really commit to it. And of course, there's a small number who will always be against vaccination. The sooner we get the vaccine, the sooner those around us are safe. We need to be realistic; we cannot return to normality until people immunity is reached. Most of my community members I have spoken to, said they would immediately get the vaccine when available to them.

Chin (Burmese) Community Multicultural community gathering

Lian Ching, Chin community in Western Melbourne

Lian started Monday 22 February. His feedback from speaking with family and friends was:

- COVID-19 vaccine might be safe, but it has become available earlier than expected. I still like to receive the vaccine when time permits.
- Until this morning (checking the community and church-based social network, group forum, Viber, WhatsApp and Facebook), no one in my community has shared the links or talk about the vaccine information in both English and Hakha Chin language.
- Awareness of vaccine information and process has not been shared within the Chin community, especially in Western Melbourne.

Multicultural community gathering

A report from Southwest Melbourne community BBQ 21/2/21 with Australians from Ethiopian, Indian, Pakistani, Lebanese backgrounds, the majority living in Australia for 20 years or more and most professionals. The issue of the vaccine was raised because of the anti-vaccination protest and messages seen on social media:

There were doubts expressed about having the vaccine including:

- Concern about messages that they receive via WhatsApp e.g. COVID-19 is not real - it is fake news
- They put pork and meat product in the vaccine, so, people from Muslim background should not take it
- People are getting anti-vaccine information from their relatives from USA and UK with opinions that most migrants in America and UK refused the vaccine so they suspect that therefore they must know something
- COVID-19 does not affect younger people so, when it is their turn, they won't take it
- Suspicion why the government didn't make the vaccination mandatory.
- The majority of people had a clear understanding of the vaccine, but the sentiments indicate that people can have concerns not based on evidence.

National Seniors Australia Members and COVID-19 Support Line

– provided for comparison

Patricia, Rose, Jeni – National Seniors Member outreach and inbound 1800

Over the past weeks we have been asking members what they think about the Covid-19 vaccination. We have spoken to 161 people across inbound callers to the 1800 number and outbound call seeking vaccination information or sharing their views.

The majority are happy to have the vaccine, some hesitant, and very few are against it. Through our interactions it appears that people we speak to are more informed and what to expect than other communities.

"Not in a bursting hurry to get it, I will get it, but not in a hurry" – Female, early 80s, Brisbane, QLD

"I am worried about how I can get the vaccine. I am a bit between the gaps as I haven't seen a GP in 20 years. I don't want to miss out on getting this vaccination. I didn't have a flu shot last year as I couldn't find a clinic that was accepting new patients." – Female, 63, regional NSW (CALD)

"I have been reading about the vaccination and will take what is given to me! Same as the flu shots I guess, and I take those" - Female, 83, Melbourne, VIC

"I took a hand poll of the 65 members in attendance and the overwhelming response was that they would take the vaccine as soon as it was available. There were 8 members who indicated that they would prefer to wait until it had been further proven to be effective. No one indicated that they would outrightly refuse the vaccine." - Male, NSA Branch President in Perth, WA

“Will there be a vaccination card or certificate issued with the vaccine? How will people be able to prove they had had the vaccination. I’m keen to travel again, maybe just to NZ, so this is important to me.” Male, 70, QLD

“I think the vaccine rollout should be sped up. I’m fed up with the lockdowns and haven’t been able to go out and do things I’m used to. My son is a doctor, and he has explained why I need it, but I’d prefer the Pfizer to the AstraZeneca if given a choice.” Male, 78, VIC

Recommendations

At this early stage in the vaccination campaign twelve effective actions have been identified for the support team and other interested parties:

1. Continue to share **DoH factsheets, resources and information** with community leaders and individuals to ensure they have access to the facts
2. Continue to provide reliable, **current information in minority community languages** through the CLOs because there’s a high demand for it and some haven’t yet received any such information
3. Provide current, clear and simple information on **vaccination side effects** in community languages through the CLOs
4. Continue to **counter conspiracy theories** with consistent emphasis on simple facts
5. Document and **use the experiences of communities who have experienced COVID** in Australia or elsewhere to persuade people that COVID-19 isn’t a conspiracy
6. Continue to **communicate with community leaders**, including the anti-vaxers, because they remain a strong influence on their communities
7. Refer individuals to **trusted sources of information such as their local GPs** as well as providing language specific information
8. Continue to support and **liaise with community language speaking GPs** and their receptionists (because they can be very busy)
9. Emphasise the **importance of vaccinations for being allowed to travel**
10. Connect **Arabic-speakers to the PICAC Helpline** since they have reported being information poor.
11. Get a much **stronger balanced voice into CALD social media posts**
12. **Continue to engage** with the community to gauge their thoughts and feelings as the vaccine rollout continues.

Prepared by the National Seniors-Australian Unity new and emerging communities support team.