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MEDIA RELEASE

BCHS to invest \$80,000 in improving refugee access to mental health services

***CAPTION:** Bendigo Community Health Services cultural diversity and relationships manager Kaye Graves.*

Bendigo Community Health Services will invest \$80,000 into improving access and awareness of mental health services for refugees in Bendigo.

The State Government awarded the \$80,000 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Grant to Bendigo Community Health Services today as part of Mental Health Week.

The grants are designed to support culturally and linguistically diverse Victorians experiencing or at risk of poor mental health.

Bendigo Community Health Services cultural diversity and relationships team manager Kaye Graves said understanding the lived experience of the refugee was key to improving their mental health.

"Many people of refugee background require support for issues including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and substance misuse," Ms Graves said.

"Their lived experience combined with language barriers, cultural beliefs and poor health literacy may stop people from seeking help."

Ms Graves said BCHS would work with the refugee community, health professionals and community leaders to improve services and increase awareness of what support was available in Bendigo.

"We need to identify those most at risk and learn more about their lived experiences to identify risks and enhance the protective factors that influence mental health," Ms Graves said.

"We need to generate more discussion about mental ill health and reduce the stigma that surrounds this issue."

Ms Graves said the project would increase understanding of the refugee journey and the impact of trauma on learning to ensure services were inclusive, safe and culturally sensitive.

“We want to look at ways of reducing the mental health risk such as providing opportunities for people to socialise through settlement activities, cultural events or celebrations and general recreational activities.”

The grants program is being co-ordinated by the Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council and Tandem who represents Victorian mental health carers.

Victorian Minister for Mental Health Martin Foley said all Victorians had the right to access mental health services.

“These grants will help providers improve treatment and care for the people they support,” he said.

“Mental Health Week not only reinforces the importance of openly discussing mental health, it is also a yearly reminder to check up on friends, family and colleagues.”

Visit www.bchs.com.au to learn more about the refugee settlement services at Bendigo Community Health Services.



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