



Polish Mental Health Forum Evaluation Report

**A collaborative Project between the Migrant
Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne), Maroondah
Hospital Mental Health Service, South East Region
Migrant Resource Centre and the Polish Community
Council of Victoria**

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Polish Mental Health Forum
Evaluation Report
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1 Introduction

The Polish Forum “The Impact of Migration on Well Being” was held at 3pm to 5pm on Sunday, 12th November 2000 at Polish House in Rowville. The forum was planned and facilitated by Maroondah Hospital, the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne), South Eastern Region Migrant Resource Centre and the Polish Community Council of Victoria.

The forum was highly successful with more than 100 people attending. Well respected health professionals of Polish background made presentations at the forum which was widely promoted in Polish media, churches and clubs and particularly targeted to people from Polish background residing in the Eastern and South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

This report is an evaluation of the forum from both the perspective of participants as well as those who contributed to its planning, promotion and facilitation.

2 Evaluation Method

Participants were asked to complete Feedback Sheets to measure their satisfaction with the forum and to provide some indication of their specific interests in the areas of emotional health and well being. In relation to agency representatives and community workers, people who contributed to the planning and facilitation of the forum were interviewed. During the interviews, people were asked to reflect on project successes, areas for improvement, what they had learnt from the project and how it would affect their planning and facilitation of mental health programs in the future.

3 Background

At a meeting of the Maroondah Hospital Area Mental Health Service Cultural Diversity Reference Group in April 2000, Joanna Adamowicz, a psychologist of Polish background working at Chandler House, Community Mental Health Centre (CHCMHC), identified the need to provide information about mental health services in Victoria to people of Polish background. Previous research had identified that Polish people attached a strong stigma to mental illness and as a result, individuals and families were reluctant to seek early assistance and support.¹

The need to inform culturally and linguistically diverse communities of mental health services was also identified by the Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) in the development of a needs analysis of migrant communities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds residing in the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne.² As a result, Judy McDougall, Community Projects Officer at the Migrant Information Centre

¹ Evert, Helen, “Polish Community Mental Health Profile: A Guide to Clinicians and Service Providers” The Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit, June 1996.

² See chapter on health in the report of the needs analysis “Making a Future” which is available on the MIC’s web site www.micestmelb.com.au.

(Eastern Melbourne) (MIC) who also attended the reference group meeting, suggested that she meet with Joanna to develop an appropriate response for the Polish community.

After two initial meetings, the Polish Community Council of Victoria and the South Eastern Migrant Resource Centre were invited to participate in a Planning Group to plan and facilitate an information forum on mental health. The forum included presentations from health professionals of Polish background and agency service promotions.

4 Organising the forum

Two initial meetings were held in late May and early July between the MIC and CHCMHC to identify mental health issues and activities to meet the needs of the Polish community. A representative from the Polish Communities Council of Victoria (PCCV) and the Community Projects Officer at the South East Region Migrant Resource Centre were then invited and agreed to participate in the further development of the forum. A welfare student of Polish background on work experience at the MIC also participated in the Planning Group.

Meetings of the four participating agencies were held in mid July and August to develop and finalise the:

- Purpose,
- Aims and objectives,
- Action plan,
- Agenda and invitation,
- Speakers,
- Promotion strategy, and
- Feedback Sheet.

A final meeting was held in October to enable the speakers to meet and discuss their talks and how the topics of the presentations link together.

Planning and facilitating the forum was resource intensive. People, who participated in the Planning Group particularly the health professionals and speakers, had to include their work in relation to the forum in addition to their normal workload. This impacted on the timelines for organising the forum and if these circumstances continue, it will have an even greater impact on facilitating future activities identified by the community as a result of this forum. This issue will be discussed further in the concluding comments of this report.

5 Purpose of the forum

The purpose of the forum was to:

- Provide information to people from Polish backgrounds residing in the Eastern and South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne on issues related to mental health and well being and community mental health services.
- Pilot an approach to inform people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds on mental health through working collaboratively with mental health service providers and local communities.

6 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of the forum were to:

- ◆ Increase access to mental health services for people from Polish background through an increased understanding of:
 - What is mental health, what are the symptoms and what can trigger mental illness?
 - Cultural responses to mental illness,
 - Mental health services in the Eastern and South Eastern suburbs of Melbourne; and
- ◆ Provide an opportunity for community mental health agencies to promote their services to people from Polish background and to gain a greater understanding of issues people from Polish background face in relation to mental illness within the family.

7 Forum invitation and agenda

The planning group developed the invitation and agenda to address the aims and objectives of the forum. The use of language in the development of both the invitation and the agenda was particularly important primarily because of the stigma associated with mental illness in the Polish community.

The Polish speakers who participated in planning the forum discussed the use of words at some length. It was generally felt that the language that was used in both the invitation and agenda could be translated from English to Polish using words and phrases that would not make people feel threatened or ashamed. The aim was to use words that people could relate to and feel passionate about, yet not feel afraid because their attendance could be interpreted by their community as having a mental illness either themselves or in their family.³

³ One planning group member who became involved in the forum at a later stage, felt that the language was too general and could be seen as misleading.

In relation to the agenda, Polish speakers were asked by the Planning Group to talk about firstly, what is emotional well being and adjustment, secondly, understanding cultural responses to mental illness within the Polish community, thirdly, community health and the role of the GP, and lastly, the Victorian mental health system. In addition to the speakers, agencies providing mental health services in the eastern and south eastern suburbs of Melbourne were invited to set up displays and promote their services. English summaries of the speakers' presentations were available for workers who were not fluent in Polish.⁴ Six agencies were able to attend on the day.

8 Speakers

Local health professionals from Polish background were invited to talk at the forum. Presenting the forum in the language of participants without the assistance of interpreters contributed to the forum's success. Refreshments included Polish cakes, which were donated by a Polish coffee and cake shop in Dandenong "Margarita". In the Feedback Sheets, one respondent commented "Good that it was held in Polish".

9 Forum promotion

The forum was promoted widely through ethnic media and through the distribution of leaflets at the Polish church, the Polish General Practitioner's surgery in Dandenong and Polish clubs including Polish House and Polish elderly citizen's clubs in the regions. The ethnic media promotion included a half page advertisement in the Polish Weekly in two consecutive publications and promotion on 3CR Polish talk back radio. A representative from Polish radio attended the forum and taped the speakers for further discussion on the program.

The Polish GP who spoke at the forum was well known in the local area and well respected within the community. His support and the support of the local Priest and clubs as well as the promotional strategy within ethnic media contributed to the forum's success and the interest shown by the Polish community.

10 Community feedback

Forty-one Feedback Sheets were completed which represents less than 50% of all participants. However, only 60 Feedback Sheets were copied for distribution because the forum facilitators did not anticipate the high attendance numbers. Given the poor response in the past to forums that relate to mental health issues, the level of interest and support from the Polish community for this forum was indeed a welcome surprise. Below is a summary of the information provided in the Feedback Sheets.

⁴ For a copy of the summaries, contact Judy McDougall at the MIC on 9873 1666.

10.1 Age and gender of participants

The gender of participants who completed the Feedback Sheet was 27% male and 66% female. See Table 1 for the age of participants who completed the Feedback Sheet.

Table 1 - Age of participants who completed the Feedback Sheets

Age	Number of Participants
Less than 20 years	0
30 to 39 years	2
40 to 49 years	11
50 to 59 years	11
60 to 69 years	9
70 years or more	7
Unknown	1

10.2 Overall impressions of the forum

Participants were asked to circle the picture that best represented their overall impressions of the forum, the speakers and the day and time the forum was held. In relation to people's overall impression of the forum, 73.2% (30) indicated they were "Pleased", 9.8% (4) "Neither Pleased Nor Displeased" and 17% (7) did not respond. In relation to their impressions of the speakers, 75.6% (31) indicated they were "Pleased", 12.2% (5) "Neither Pleased Nor Displeased", 2.4% (1) were disappointed and 9.8% (4) did not respond to the question. In relation to the day and time the forum was held, 85.4% (35) were "Pleased", 4.9% (2) were "Neither Pleased Nor Displeased" and 9.8% (4) did not respond.

Overall, the majority of people who completed the Feedback Sheets were pleased with the forum, speakers and the day and time the forum was held. These results were particularly pleasing for the facilitators as the day chosen coincided with a religious function that was held in the morning. Comments written on the Feedback Sheet included: "Well organised forum"; "Very successful seminar"; "I am glad it was in Polish"; "Very interesting initiative, please organise more"; and, "Thank you for organising this forum. The meeting was very interesting and prepared in a professional manner. Please continue."

Other comments to assist the Planning Group with organising future forums included:

- I suggest shorter time.
- Too many subjects at the one time.
- I expected more flyers on psychiatric illnesses and how to cure them. The information was too detailed.
- Please install a microphone in the future.

- Thank you very much for organising this event. It is worth repeating. There were too many statistics but except for this, it was very interesting.
- We need more information about available services but not in such a broad context.
- The session was very interesting but too much information at once. The first speaker should start gradually beginning with depression and later on going to psychiatric illnesses. Some people suffer from depression but are not aware of it. Some specialist words like "somatic" are not familiar to the average participant. I think there should be time for discussion, which will give you an idea of participants' points of view and their needs.

10.3 Venue

Participants were asked to tick the box that best described the venue. They could tick more than one box from the following list - "Central Location", "Adequate Parking", "Comfortable Seating", "Good Sound and Amenities", "Familiar to Polish People". Space was also provided on the form for people to write their own comments about the venue. Table 2 shows the responses to this request.

Table 2 - Number of ticks to describe the venue

Description	Number	Percentage (%)
Central location	25	61%
Adequate parking	26	63.4%
Familiar to people of Polish background	33	80.5%
Comfortable seating	19	47.5%
Good sound and amenities	6	14.6%
Other	14	34%

More than 80.5% (33) of participants were familiar with the venue as it was held in a small hall in Polish House which is a major community centre for Polish people offering educational, social and recreational activities for the community. The venue was generally seen as a central location with adequate parking. However, 7 people mentioned the lack of a microphone and 5 people indicated the venue was too small. Due to the large numbers of people who attended the forum, people were forced to sit close together. As a result, the room was cramped and stuffy. Facilitators had to stand at the door and advise people that there was no more room.

In addition, the cramped conditions made it difficult for some people to hear the speakers. A microphone was not available because the facilitators did not think it would be necessary because they were expecting a smaller group. Based on previous experiences of forums on mental health issues, the facilitators were expecting only about 20 people to attend the forum. For future events, a microphone will be available to ensure that all people can hear the presentations.

10.4 Knowledge of the forum

Participants were asked to indicate how they found about the forum. 61% (25) of people saw a notice at their club or in the Polish newspaper, 14.6% (6) of people found out through word of mouth, 9.8% (4) through Polish radio, 4.9% (2) through flyers, 4.9% (2) through the church and 2.4% (1) through work, the doctor or another family member.

The strategy to distribute leaflets to clubs and churches and to advertise in Polish media was effective in informing the community of the forum.

10.5 Future forums

To indicate topics of interest for future forums, participants were asked to tick the box beside the topic of their interest. They could tick more than one box and space was provided on the sheet for people to list other topics of interest. Table 3 shows the responses to this question.

Table 3 - Topics of interest by the number of ticks

Description	Number	Percentage (%)
Women's health	30	73.2%
Aged care	27	66%
Youth issues	18	44%
Parenting	12	29.3%
Men's health	11	27%
Adolescent health	9	22%
Diabetes	2	5%
Psychiatric health	1	2.4%
Alcoholism	1	2.4%
Heart disease and related illness	1	2.4%
Depression and related illness	1	2.4%
Hepatitis B	1	2.4%

The greatest number of respondents indicated interest in Women's Health and Aged Care. In relation to Men's Health, it is interesting to note that 11 men completed Feedback Sheets and 11 people ticked interest in the topic. This seems to indicate that men have an interest in their health. The mental health and health areas listed by respondents could be addressed in the Women's Health and Men's Health sessions. Other topics that respondents indicated significant interest in, included Youth Issues (18) and Parenting (12).

Six respondents wrote on the Feedback Sheet to continue organising similar events. One respondent wrote: "We are waiting for further educational meetings for ethnic groups. It is prevention which is half of the success in all efforts."

11 Reflections of the planning group

The Planning Group viewed the forum as highly successful given the high attendance and interest generated within the Polish community. The success was attributed to:

- The promotional strategy including gaining the support of Polish community organisations, clubs and churches,
- Holding the forum in a Polish community venue,
- Inviting health professionals from Polish background to speak at the forum particularly the Polish GP who was well known within the local Polish community,
- Organising the forum on an appropriate day and time when many people of all age groups were available to attend, and
- Using non-threatening language that people can relate to, to talk about the impact of migration on mental health.⁵

The forum has demonstrated that there is interest within the community to learn and talk about mental health issues and a wide range of other service areas such as men and women's health, youth issues and parenting.

In relation to mental health, future forums should focus on specific areas of mental health such as depression, alcoholism, the rights of individuals and families within the mental health system, addressing complaints on mental health services, etc.

For this forum, members of the Polish community donated the refreshments and the use of the venue free of charge. Five agencies supported the forum through enabling staff to participate and contribute their time. The mental health workers and the GP had to use their own time to complete tasks for the forum including preparing presentations, writing an English summary of their talk and translating notices and the Feedback Sheet. Their ability to contribute to future forums will depend on their professional and personal priorities.

Given the interest within the community, the forum demonstrated a strategy for promoting mental health and mental health services within culturally and linguistically diverse communities. However, future seminars and workshops on specific areas of mental health will require support and resources from mental health services for planning, promotion and facilitation. In addition, if professional speakers from Polish background are not available to talk on the specific area, interpreters will be required. This forum represents the first step in generating interest and gaining trust within the community. Follow up on the issues identified at the forum in a timely manner will continue to build this relationship and mental health within the Polish community.

⁵ See previous footnote, one facilitator did not share this view.

12 Key findings

The key findings in relation to planning, promotion and facilitation are noted below.

12.1 Planning forums

In planning successful forums for communities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the contribution and participation of professionals from the same background is invaluable. They have personal knowledge of cultural and religious factors that influence community responses as well as a good understanding of Victorian service systems. Engaging a number of professionals from the same background allows them to work together to discuss and develop culturally appropriate language and strategies.

Forums provide an opportunity for people from agencies to make contact with community leaders, ethnic specific agencies and clubs, to promote their services and to build trust within the community.

Planning and facilitating forums in partnership with other agencies is time-consuming and resource intensive.

12.2 Promotion

Ethnic media is an effective medium for promoting forums for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

A translated flyer distributed through clubs and community leaders is an effective promotional strategy within the Polish community.

Support and promotion of health forums through respected GPs within the community is an effective promotional strategy.

12.3 Facilitation

There is interest within the Polish community to learn and talk about mental health issues and a wide range of other service areas such as men and women's health, youth issues and parenting.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are more likely to attend forums held in their preferred language with professional speakers from the same background.

13 Future directions

The Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) will negotiate with community mental health services to identify resources and projects to develop future programs on mental health for the Polish community.

The Migrant Information Centre (Eastern Melbourne) in consultation with relevant local agencies will plan and facilitate one information forum per year to meet the information needs of the Polish community commencing with women's health and aged care.