

Health perspectives of the Yazidi community in Toowoomba



This report summarises key insights and findings from thirty individuals/ families of the Yazidi community who were interviewed about their health perspectives and concerns. These insights create space for better health outcomes.

Since 2017, Toowoomba has become home to more than 2000 people from the Yazidi (Ezidi) community, predominantly from Northern Iraq.

Yazidi are an endogamous religious minority that speak Kurdish Kurmanji, an oral language. There have been 74 recorded genocides committed against this community, the most recent in 2014. The community have experienced significant trauma prior to arriving in

Australia. Migrants arriving in Australia who have experienced a refugee journey often need additional support with health concerns and management. This may be due to experiencing persecution, poor access to health care prior to arrival, limited understanding of Australian health systems and how to navigate them, low health literacy, low income, and other social health determinants.

Local health services also face the challenge of providing services that are culturally appropriate and meet the needs of the community.

CatholicCare's Group Toowoomba (GT) is a refugee health advisory group with four health consultants from the Yazidi community. The GT exists to develop a bridge between local health services and the Yazidi community in Toowoomba to maximise health outcomes.

Key Insights

Most common health problems in the community as identified by the community:

1. Mental health
2. Diabetes
3. Blood pressure

Barriers to taking care of health or managing health concerns:

- » Language
- » Time and balancing other commitments eg family, study, work

What is the best thing for you and your family about the Australian health system?

1. Medical staff are respectful and take care of patients
2. Free and low-cost health care and medication
3. Access to a GP
4. Advanced medical equipment and technology
5. Ambulance and emergency care



What is a healthy life like?

If you want to live a healthy life then you should be able to not think too much because I believe that all our problems are because we think too much. Negative thoughts in our heads can affect our hearts.

Has enough energy to do everything that needs to be done. (eg work, study, exercise)

All doors are opened in front of a healthy person.

Mental health is more important than physical health.

Having balanced mental health because that will enable us to get a job and stay active and eventually that will lead to good physical health.

Healthy body, strong health, mentally feeling good, financially good, always wants to learn new things.



8 of 10

Respondents commented that medical staff are respectful and care.



I can't stop thinking about my family (how they are living in our home country).



Key Insights

What could be changed about the way health is looked after in Australia?

1. Wait time in Emergency
2. Wait time for GP and specialist appointments
3. Access to appropriate interpreters
4. Availability and cost of dental care
5. Approaches to complex topics such as informed consent and death and dying

Top 5 health topics the community would like to know more about:

1. General healthy living eg diet, exercise
2. Oral health
3. Mental health
4. Pain and body aches
5. Vision and eyes

Preferred delivery methods for health information:

1. Group or community information sessions
2. Video/audio delivered in language and distributed via social media/direct message

2 of 3

Respondents are concerned about the long wait times in Emergency.

“

The one thing that I do not like here in Australia is doctors always scare patients and I think this is something bad and needs to be stopped... for example when they want to conduct a procedure on a patient, they would start to tell them scary things such as “there is a good chance [you will] die and even if you survived you may not be able to walk any more”. So what happened then is patients in this case develop some mental issues and refuse to have that procedure done...

”

In Summary

Approaches to health have strong cultural overlays and assumptions, but there is space to have better dialogue and information sharing about the issues of concern to the Yazidi community. This opportunity goes both ways – both for the Yazidi community to learn about topics of relevance, and for health services and staff to learn and adapt to maximise the effectiveness of the ongoing work they do. The GT have identified the following issues as initial priorities moving forward for the community:

- 1. Emergency Department.** It has become evident through discussion regarding this issue that many in the Yazidi community are not confident to identify what is or is not an emergency, are not aware of alternatives other than the Emergency Department if their regular GP is not available, and are not familiar with the concept of triage.
- 2. Informed consent, death and dying.** These are complex issues with strong emotional responses. Many in the community find the Australian practice of explaining all risks in preparation for medical procedures

very confronting. They are not used to being provided with choice in a medical setting where they expect the doctor to be an authority who will tell them what to do. Also, Australian approaches to life limiting illnesses, including sharing information about life expectancy, or asking questions in preparation for death, can be confronting.

- 3. General healthy living and diet.** Diabetes also continues to be an issue of concern for the community.
- 4. Oral health** including access to dental services and preventative dental care.
- 5. Health checks.** Preventative health care and information about regular health checks is a topic that the community requires more information about.
- 6. Mental health.** This is a complex area but an area of significant concern for the Yazidi community in Toowoomba. This community has experienced high levels of trauma and it is to be expected that mental health will continue to be a priority for families and individuals.

“

...sometimes they would bring interpreters that we would not understand.

”