



## **Multicultural Women's Health Australia Launch**

**17 November 2011**

**Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA)**

**Advancing Multiculturalism Conference**

**Adelaide Convention Centre, Adelaide, South Australia**

### **Introduction: Vision, Passion, Collaboration and Change**

**Adele Murdolo, Executive Director, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health**

I would like to take you on a journey with us, with the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, to the establishment of the Multicultural Women's Health Australia Program 33 years on.

This is a journey of **vision** – the vision of trailblazing women, and supporting men, who dreamed the establishment of a health organisation for migrant women and who made it a reality. It is a journey of **passion** – the passion of all the women who have been involved in that dream over its 33 years and carried it on until the present day. It is a journey of **collaboration** – with immigrant and refugee women, community workers, unions, academics, health professionals, and advocates, who have worked tirelessly and spoken out to improve the health status of immigrant and refugee women. Each person who has given their time to this cause has done so with the support and encouragement of a second. It is a journey of **change** – from a small organisation established in 1978 called Action for Family Planning, through to the thriving, active, engaged organisation that is now in a position to establish a successful national program. This capacity to change ensures that MCWH remains responsive to a dynamic immigration program and successfully navigates the many changes in Australia's social, cultural and political landscape.

We are proud of the establishment of the Multicultural Women's Health Australia Program and acknowledge the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing for their support. Congratulations to Regina Quiazon, National Program Manager and Maria Hach, Health Promotion and Project Officer, and all MCWH staff who have been involved in the Program on their achievements.

I would now like to introduce you to Repa Patel, the Chairperson of the MCWH Board of Management. Repa is an executive coach and positive change consultant with extensive corporate experience in senior leadership roles. She holds a Bachelor of Laws with Honours, has been nominated as Telstra Businesswoman of the Year and is a qualified Kripalu Yoga teacher. Repa is passionate about making a difference to the lives of immigrant and refugee women, driven by her own and her family's experience as migrants.

## **Multicultural Women's Health Australia**

**Repa Patel, Chairperson, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health**

Imagine:

- You have relocated to Australia due to economic difficulties and political pressures in your country.
- You have a casual job as an office cleaner, working mostly early mornings and evenings.
- Shortly after arriving, you find out that you are pregnant with your first child.
- You do not speak English, you have never used the internet and you have few relatives close by.
- Money is tight and you do not have a car or a drivers licence yet.

How do you access pregnancy and health information?

You would be a perfect candidate to benefit from the newly-formed Multicultural Women's Health Australia. MWA works with the organisations that work with you, building their capacity to provide you with the linguistically and culturally-appropriate service you need.

- MWA provides national leadership in immigrant and refugee women's health. Through web-based resources and a 1800 free call number, MWA provides secondary consultation and resources to organisations around Australia so that they may adapt their services in ways that overcome employment-related, transport, financial and linguistic barriers. If you could make your way to your local community health service or GP, they could link with MWA to ensure that you receive an appropriate and effective health consultation.
- MWA provides an electronic portal to over 10,000 written, audio or video multilingual information that organisations around Australia may access and pass on to you, so that you might learn more about pregnancy in your own language.
- MWA provides professional development to health professionals and community workers, to build their capacity to work more appropriately with immigrant and refugee women.
- MWA conducts advocacy, policy development and research coordination, ensuring that your issues – issues shared by immigrant and refugee women across Australia – are communicated to government and other stakeholders, and your views are represented in policy and legislation.



MWHA has just started operation, but its history of providing health and wellbeing information and education to immigrant and refugee women is long.

The MWHA program is conducted by Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, an immigrant and refugee women's health organisation that has been in operation since 1978. MCWH started as a small, outreach, bilingual and peer-education program working with migrant women in factories to provide education about contraception, assisting women to make more informed choices about pregnancy. Over the years, the scope and size of the organisation has grown; it now covers a range of health and wellbeing topics, reaches women working in all industries and settings, including at home and in the community, and it provides a range of related services, from extensive, superior multilingual information, to professional development, research and advocacy.

Run by immigrant and refugee women, for immigrant and refugee women, MCWH continues to use peer, bilingual health education with women following the 'woman-to-woman' approach where immigrant and refugee women are active participants in understanding and shaping their own health. Based on this on-the-ground contact with over 3,000 immigrant and refugee women per year, MCWH is unique in its capacity to accurately and with integrity, represent the health and wellbeing concerns of immigrant and refugee women. Its uniqueness lies in its position within the community it serves. MCWH is an integral part of the community of immigrant and refugee women, modelling in its very structure self-determination and active decision-making in women's health by immigrant and refugee women themselves.

MWHA, the latest and proudest addition to the programs and projects offered by MCWH, provides a national focus to this work and expands out the scope to immigrant and refugee women across Australia. MWHA makes best use of these links with women on the ground to build connections around immigrant and refugee women's health and wellbeing across Australia.