

## 2. Promoting migrant and refugee women's health through evidence-based research and policy: Multicultural Women's Health Australia

### In 2026-27 MCWH calls upon the Australian Government to:

Provide ongoing, sustainable multiyear funding to MCWH for the continuation of the MWA program.

**Over 4 years \$2,800,000.**

Migrant and refugee women in Australia have poorer health outcomes, and lower levels of access to health services than the general population. Research shows that migration is a key determinant of health, and migrant and refugee women in particular are more vulnerable to health deterioration because of gender-specific barriers and challenges.<sup>11</sup> To address this health inequity, we need to better understand the specific barriers to healthcare impacting on migrant and refugee women, and how to systemically improve health outcomes. A better understanding will be achieved by bringing together migrant and refugee women's concerns, service sector and policy knowledge with the latest research, and translating the available evidence into tangible program, service and policy development.

The Multicultural Women's Health Australia (MWA) program, which operated across Australia until 2023, did just that. Coordinated by Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH), the program facilitated a national network of specialist organisations in each state and territory that worked to promote the health and wellbeing of migrant and refugee women. The Network provided up to date data and information to enable a comprehensive national picture to be drawn about migrant and refugee women's sexual and reproductive health status and access to local health services. This local knowledge was complemented by MCWH's coordinating function, which provided research, evidence, expert advice and advocacy on a range of key issues impacting migrant and refugee women's sexual and reproductive health.

MWA has been regularly sought out by government and key health and welfare organisations to provide robust evidence-based policy advice that centres the needs of migrant and refugee women, even two years after the end of the funded project. What makes MWA's work different is that it provides up to date, nationally focused, evidence-based resources and advice, based on the latest research combined with the voices of migrant and refugee women themselves. All of this is made possible by MWA's access, and translation into policy, to the real-time feedback received from migrant and refugee women who participate in MCWH programs, enabled by the expertise of a highly trained and accredited bilingual health workforce. This is a unique capability unrivalled by any other organisation across Australia.

MWA has worked collaboratively with other women's advocacy

and policy organisations, such as the Australian Women’s Health Alliance (AWHA), and the Australian Multicultural Women’s Alliance (AMWA), ensuring that their advocacy has a robust, intersectional research evidence base with a strong and real time connection to the lived experience of migrant and refugee women. There is no overlap between MWA and the work of these alliances: The AWHA maintains a focus on all Australian women’s health and relies on MWA to provide them with robust advice in relation to migrant and refugee women. The AMWA has a broad scope, of which health is one small component. To date, the AMWA’s policy-related output has not produced any health-related material and remains focused on migrant and refugee women’s economic and employment issues.

Key outputs of MWA include the Sexual and Reproductive Health Data Report, and the Advancing the Evidence Conference. Funded by the Department of Health for over 20 years, this work strengthened organisational linkages and communications between the health system, community organisations, consumers and the Australian government. MWA was pivotal in ensuring that migrant and refugee women’s voices, concerns and lived experience was considered in policy, service and program development across Australia. 2,000 subscribers, and up to 870 readers each issue.

Over the 2019-2023 funding period, **MWA was recognised as a leader in the field**, and was regularly invited to **support health and welfare organisations, health professionals and policy makers** to deliver evidence-based and tailored programs and policy to migrant and refugee women.



and published **four peer-reviewed research papers** on emerging topics such as reproductive coercion and family violence.

# How do we know MWA works?

- MWA provides **effective, evidence-based policy analysis and advice to government**. Since 2011, when the Federal Government signed a deed with private overseas student health companies allowing a 12-month waiting period to be placed on claims for pregnancy-related care, MWA raised awareness about the detrimental impacts of the deed on international students and their families. **MWCH and MWA Network partners developed submissions, position papers, contributed to public forums and hearings, advocated for change and published papers**. In 2025, the Federal government reviewed the Deed and has now removed the 12-month waiting period for pregnancy related claims for insurance policies that are for 2 years or more, enabling more international students to access affordable pregnancy care in a timely manner.
- The **WRAP monthly e-newsletter** is an essential resource for policy makers, academics and health professionals. Over the 2019-2023 funding period, **the WRAP became recognised as a go-to source of information**, having been opened a total of 20,595 unique times, and with an open rate that grew from under 30% to 55% by the end of the period, well over the Australian NFP open average at that time which was 28%. Discussing key advocacy and policy issues related to migrant and refugee women’s health and wellbeing, it now has **over 2,000 subscribers**, and up to 870 readers each issue.