

# University of Melbourne report praises Shepparton's Wise Well Women multicultural health program

ABC Shepparton / By Charmayne Allison and Courtney Howe

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Shakilla Naveed was one of 12 trainees who took part in a program to deliver health information to Shepparton's culturally and linguistically diverse community. (ABC News Shepparton: Courtney Howe)

Shakilla Naveed knows educating one woman about health has the power to change an entire community.

But when she arrived in Shepparton more than four years ago, she saw language and cultural barriers keeping many in her Afghan community from seeking healthcare.

The issue became most stark during the COVID-19 pandemic, as members struggled to understand health messaging or access vaccines and testing.

So, when an opportunity came up to become a community health educator, Ms Naveed jumped at the chance.

"Many people need help," she said.

"But now they have the opportunity to learn."

## Key points:

- A group of multicultural women is working to improve health outcomes in Shepparton
- The University of Melbourne has released a report on the program and its impacts
- Wise Well Women says more ongoing funding is needed to continue its work



Community health educators presenting at a Wise Well Women session. (Supplied: Wise Well Women)

## Empowerment best way to deliver health messages

Ms Naveed is part of Wise Well Women, a [group of 12 culturally and linguistically diverse \(CALD\) female community health educators](#).

Formed in 2020, the group enlisted the University of Melbourne's Culturally Inclusive Rural Healthcare Team to evaluate the program and train members.



Research assistant Habiba Ibrahim said trainees increased in confidence and ability to deliver health messages to their communities. (ABC News Shepparton: Courtney Howe)

More than a year on, the university has released its evaluation of the program and it has been described by research assistant Habiba Ibrahim as a success.

"Empowering people to speak to their own communities is the best way that we can deliver important health messages," she said.

"As a multicultural woman myself, I've seen the importance of this program."

When it came to key issues in their communities, Wise Well Women members said women's health, family violence and chronic illness were at the top of the list.

The group was also helping women navigate public services such as Legal Aid and Centrelink.

Ms Ibrahim said the group prevented many CALD community members from falling through the cracks during the pandemic.

"The trainees have been able to go into their own communities and deliver information around vaccinations," she said.



Ms Ibrahim gives a presentation at Wise Well Women's community health educator evaluation. (Supplied: Wise Well Women)

## Calls for ongoing funding to ensure continuity

Wise Well Women co-convenor Chris Nunn hoped the positive evaluation of the program would lead to ongoing operational funding.

"At the moment we've been going from small grant to small grant, and that's rather tiring," she said.

"So it would be good if we could convince organisations to support us, whether that's philanthropic organisations or government.

"One of the things we're also keen to do is actually get a good governance model and talk to agencies about them actually paying for work we do for them."



Wise Well Women co-convenor Ms Nunn says ongoing funding is needed to keep the program running. (ABC News Goulburn Murray: Charmayne Allison)

Ms Ibrahim said the main aim was for the program to continue.

"We can get so much more out of this program," she said.

"We've seen the outcome, we've seen the result.

"This is not just beneficial for the multicultural community but for the entire Shepparton community."

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