

REFUGEE YOUTH ISSUES NETWORK OF SA (RYINSA)

REFUGEE YOUTH HEALTH and WELLBEING POLICY

Background

Young new arrivals from refugee backgrounds are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups in society. Some have been child soldiers, some have witnessed or experienced torture and trauma, some have received very little or no formal education or have had their education disrupted, many have lost or become separated from their usual sources of support, including family, friends and familiar networks and some have spent years in refugee camps or immigration detention centres. These young people generally arrive in Australia with no money or worldly goods, with poor English language skills and with little or no understanding of Australian culture and systems. Some arrive alone or with unfamiliar distant relatives and have very few if any sources of support. Adjusting to life in a new country can be very difficult for any migrant but it can be particularly difficult for refugees who have been subject to forced migration. Young refugees in the initial stages of resettlement have to contend with many difficult issues including learning a new language, adjusting to a new culture and systems, coping with pre and post migration experiences of loss, trauma and disruption, making new friends and, for many, helping parents cope with the resettlement process.

Policy Position

The wellbeing of refugee youth is integral to their successful resettlement. Their general and physical health has a major impact on their ability to overcome the barriers to settlement. The Refugee Youth Issues Network of SA (RYINSA) believes that young refugees:

- Have the right to equitable access to appropriate health services
- Have the right to fully participate in affordable, accessible and appropriate healthy lifestyle activities
- Should understand and adopt healthy lifestyle practices, specifically relating to (but not limited to) SA Government priorities of smoking, healthy weight and sport and recreation
- Have equitable access to tertiary education in relevant fields for personal development and to foster community understanding of wellbeing issues.

Current Challenges

Refugee youth face enormous barriers settling in South Australia. They struggle with intergenerational conflict, with meeting the expectations of their parents and communities, and with trying to balance two cultural lifestyles. Without considerable and appropriate support to overcome these barriers, refugee youth are at risk of adopting unhealthy lifestyle practices including excessive use of drugs and alcohol, problem gambling and criminal activities.

Research has identified that CALD people have low participation rates in structured recreation and sport activities. Rates of participation by refugee youth are further decreased due to the social, economic and transport barriers they face during settlement.

Our challenges are to:

- Raise awareness and encourage uptake of refugee youth for healthy lifestyle practices
- Encourage health professionals and governments at all levels to work together to better identify and service refugee youth
- Encourage sport, recreation and social clubs to develop healthy lifestyle programs that are affordable, accessible and appropriate for refugee youth
- Reduce the impact of transport barriers on participation in healthy lifestyle activities
- Develop initiatives to help refugee and CALD youth to identify and follow education and employment pathways in health and recreation fields.

Key Priorities

RYINSA's key priorities are to advocate for:

- SA Strategic Plan objectives to Improve Wellbeing to include targets and strategies specific to the needs of and issues faced by refugee youth
- SA and Australian Government Health Programs to incorporate strategies and key messages that are relevant and culturally appropriate for refugee youth
- KPIs for all recreation and sport funding agreements to include strategies for making programs more accessible, affordable and appropriate for refugee youth
- KPIs for all recreation and sport funding agreements to include delivery of cross-cultural awareness training (leading to increased competencies)
- Public transport programs that support participation in healthy lifestyle activities
- Bridging programs to enable and encourage refugee and CALD youth to pursue TAFE and university courses in health and recreation professions.

