

# Case study: Experience and impact of inclusion

## Cohealth's Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response Program

**Connecting people affected by mental health issues to their community through volunteering.**

### **Background**

Cohealth is a community health organisation that provides essential health and support services in Melbourne's Western and Northern suburbs, as well as the CBD.

One of its programs is called Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response (EIPSR) and is run collaboratively alongside the Royal Melbourne Hospital. People who have been discharged from admission in the psychiatric ward are assigned a mental health clinical case manager by the hospital. This case manager helps them to stabilise at home, and once stable, the person is referred to a community mental health worker from the Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response program (people accessing this program are referred to as consumers).

### **Location**

In the North West catchment area, Cohealth employs 12 community mental health workers who are based at sites in Melton, Sunshine, Moonee Ponds and Parkville. They service the Northern and Western suburbs of Melbourne.

### **Project Aims**

The Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response program supports consumers to live at home and in the community. The community mental health workers at Cohealth work closely with consumers and their clinicians to find what is important to them and support them in their recovery.

Social, vocational, educational, housing, financial (rather than clinical / medicinal) are the types of support provided by the program, and the community mental health workers typically work with consumers for 12 months.

# Case study: Experience and impact of inclusion

## Cohealth's Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response Program

### **The Consumers**

At any given time Cohealth support between 120 – 150 consumers. Their composition is varied in terms of gender and age (people 18 – 65 can be referred to the program), however there are typically more middle-aged consumers than younger ones. Their mental health issues vary too, with some consumers having lived with mental illness their whole life while others have been triggered by certain life events. Co-morbidity is common so traits like neurodiversity and substance abuse can also present with consumers. Many consumers have housing issues and generally live alone.

### **Priority groups participating in the program**

People with a disability

### **Opportunity / challenge being addressed**

Isolation is a major challenge for consumers. Not just in terms of friends and family but they can be disconnected from local supports.

Given that consumers are also trying to manage their physical health, medication, co-morbidities etc., recovery motivation can be low. Furthermore, people who have been traumatised can be reluctant to get out of the house, use public transport, or access services so this adds another layer of complexity to overcoming isolation.

### **How inclusion was achieved**

Initially Australian Multicultural Community Services (AMCS) met with Cohealth and one of their consumers who wanted to connect to the community through volunteering. This face-to-face meeting gave the parties an opportunity to discuss options, gauge accessibility requirements, and shape expectations around timelines and role requirements. It also provided a personal element which helped the consumer understand what the Australian Multicultural Community Services' role was and built trust between them.

# Case study: Experience and impact of inclusion

## Cohealth's Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response Program

Australian Multicultural Community Services then reached out to volunteer-involving organisations in their network to find a suitable volunteer role for the consumer. Volunteer-involving organisations who showed interest were briefed on the situation and were happy to be contacted by Cohealth. Multiple options were provided to the community mental health worker who managed the admin side of things and supported the consumer to make a decision. The volunteer-involving organisation chosen gave the consumer an opportunity to tour the site and learn about the program before committing.

Throughout this process both Cohealth and the consumer felt that their needs were understood and being met by Australian Multicultural Community Services and the volunteer-involving organisations involved. They appreciated the warm referral and the open communication that came with it. It also gave the consumer confidence that they could engage with the community through volunteering as they experienced staff at Australian Multicultural Community Services and the volunteer-involving organisation who were excited to make volunteering a reality for them.

### **Benefits & Impact**

***For the consumer, volunteering provides a legitimate way to re-engage with the community as part of their recovery.***

It provides them with a sense of purpose, belonging, and a space to build relationships without pressure that may exist with employment or other services. There is a structure and stability that regular volunteering provides which can also be really beneficial for those who have recently experienced trauma.

For Cohealth and the community mental health workers, it gives them another avenue of support in which they can direct their consumers. They have limited time and resources available to provide support, so having a referral service like Australian Multicultural Community Services takes the pressure off them to meet consumer requirements. The initial interaction between

# Case study: Experience and impact of inclusion

## Cohealth's Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response Program

Cohealth and Australian Multicultural Community Services has also raised the awareness in the team that volunteering is a viable option to use as a referral. The positive first experience had led to more consumer interest in volunteering which will hopefully mean more uptake.

***For Australian Multicultural Community Services and volunteer-involving organisations, it presents an opportunity to directly connect with potential volunteers in the mental health space, giving potential volunteers from that priority group a clear pathway to building community connections.***

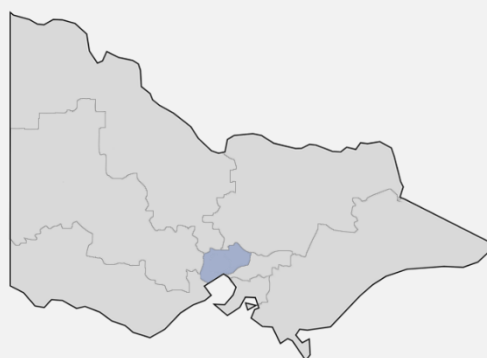
# Case study: Experience and impact of inclusion

## Cohealth's Early Intervention Psychosocial Support Response Program

**Author:** Volunteer West

**Consortium region:** North West Metro

**Date:** June 2024



This case study was produced with funding provided through the Volunteer Management Activity 2022-2026 grant. You may learn more about the program by visiting this website:

<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



Funded by the Australian Government  
Department of Social Services.



*Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*