CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

SUPPORTING WELLBEING FOR PREVENTION PRACTITIONERS IN MULTICULTURAL AND FAITH-BASED COMMUNITIES

LESSONS FROM THE CONNECTING COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

This resource has been developed as part of the *Connecting Communities* program, a partnership program between the *Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH)* and *Safe and Equal* to support the learning and professional development needs of the *Connecting Communities* network, a network of organisations working with multicultural and faith-based communities to prevent violence against women in Victoria since 2022, funded through the Victorian Government's *Supporting Multicultural Communities to Prevent Family Violence Program.*

Working in primary prevention is rewarding, and many people from the *Connecting Communities* network have shared how their work makes them feel inspired and motivated. However, working to end family violence and to create major social and structural change can also take a toll. A focus on worker wellbeing and sustainability will support prevention practitioners and organisations in their work to prevent family and gender-based violence and achieve our shared vision of safe, connected and thriving communities.
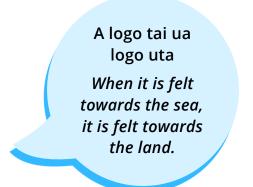
Practitioners from the *Connecting Communities* network have shared that worker needs can be better supported with long-term sufficient funding,

flexible program design, and the valuing and understanding of worker wellbeing. The lessons in this resource present a summary of discussions with the *Connecting Communities* network across workshops, trainings and Communities of Practice about what would make a meaningful difference to their wellbeing.

The knowledge shared here is particularly useful for decision-makers and managers supporting primary prevention practitioners working with multicultural and faith-based communities, both in mainstream prevention organisations and community organisations, as well as those who fund and support this work. This resource shares key lessons, and proposes calls to action, for embedding wellbeing and care into practice.

WELLBEING IMPACTS ON PREVENTION PRACTITIONERS

We need to ensure the prevention sector and our workplaces enable us to take care of ourselves and each other in pursuit of our shared purpose: to ensure the sustainability of individuals, communities, and projects. This is especially important considering the way that care-giving work is often gendered and racialised, and how this can compound negative impacts on the wellbeing of workers connected to multicultural and faith-based communities.

Some of these impacts include:

- The intertwined nature of working with a community that you are a part of. This experience may be different for women and gender diverse people than for men. It is important to acknowledge how differences in status, gender expectations, and the gendered nature of worker wellbeing may influence the needs of each practitioner.

- Additional and unrecognised organisational expectations that may lead to added work responsibilities that are beyond the scope of a practitioner's role.

- An assumed level of understanding and expertise that causes practitioners to be excluded from training and capacity-building opportunities within their organisations.

- A lack of understanding of different expressions of wellbeing and care that make practitioners feel safe and valued at work.

- Events or crises overseas disrupting communities in a way that may impact projects, but also practitioners in their own rights.

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> *When it is felt towards the sea, it is felt towards the land.*

Samoan proverb shared by a Connecting Communities participant speaking about connections between communities across distances, and how whole communities feel repercussions of significant events[1]

Primary Prevention work should be conducted in a context where the efforts of practitioners and community advocates are valued and adequately funded. For these reasons, wellbeing must focus on valuing the work of those connected to multicultural and faith-based communities, and support them to do this work sustainably. The *Connecting Communities* network has advocated that worker wellbeing is the responsibility of organisations, managers and workers themselves, and that everyone has a role to play in advocating for and supporting better, more flexible wellbeing practices across the sector.

SUPPORTING PRACTITIONER WELLBEING – KEY LESSONS

The following key learnings have been synthesised from discussions with the *Connecting Communities* network on ways to strengthen organisational and individual practices around wellbeing and sustainability for prevention practitioners working with multicultural and faith-based communities. These learnings align to a growing evidence base, for which a further reading list is provided at the end of this resource.

Flexible funding and program design to enable care practices

Practitioners shared that they often have ideas about how to foster and maintain wellbeing that cannot be implemented because their projects or organisations do not have sufficient funding or flexibility in program designs or budgets. The network called for greater support from funders to develop flexible and responsive funding arrangements to provide workers and organisations with autonomy over how and when they embed wellbeing practices into their processes and projects. Additionally, the network emphasised the importance of sustainable funding agreements that promote systemic wellbeing. Secure employment was identified as a key measure to reduce uncertainty and prevent burnout among practitioners across the sector.

Organisations to reframe and broaden understandings of care and wellbeing

Connecting Communities practitioners noted that although some existing workplace wellbeing supports, such as group debriefing, regular supervision, and flexible work arrangements, were helpful, there were numerous instances where these supports were inadequate. Practitioners shared that some systems placed excessive pressure on individuals to maintain their own wellbeing. They called for a broadened understanding of care that meets their needs, while also addressing the challenging work conditions that cause stress and harm in their work.

The network suggested that organisations shift their thinking away from pre-determined wellbeing supports and towards providing staff with the opportunity to consult on more nuanced wellbeing practices. Practitioners advocated that approaches

grounded in expression and embodiment – such as reconnection with family, friends, colleagues, community members, faith, food, and passion projects, as well as quiet reflections and time in nature – should be recognised as important tools for worker wellbeing and supported accordingly.

Embed wellbeing supports into leadership and management practices

Organisations and managers can have a positive impact on worker wellbeing. The network shared that this may include equitable and transparent practices and processes to help improve understanding, wellbeing and support. Further examples from the network on what this can look like include:

- Conversations between managers and staff about ways of working that respond to individual needs and preferences.

- Ongoing capacity building and supervision for prevention practitioners who engage with multicultural and faith-based communities.

- Supporting practitioners through comprehensive planning and scoping, training and briefing prior to community engagement, and opportunities for debriefing, connection and validation.

- Equitable remuneration and acknowledgement of practitioners, particularly part-time employees, who undertake overtime or out-of-hours work.

- Cultural leave entitlements that enable practitioners to reconnect with their communities.

Organisations to prioritise time to connect and collaborate

Practitioners shared that developing relationships with community is not something that should be considered an "added extra" to prevention work. Instead, relationship building is at the core of this work and can be an essential part of worker wellbeing and connection.

> "Caring for community and for others is sometimes a way of caring for yourself"[2]

For organisations and practitioners, this means advocating for adequate time to build these relationships without the pressure of meeting deliverables or reporting requirements. The network also shared that having the skills to build these relationships should be valued by their organisations. It is important to acknowledge that relationships with community can blur lines between personal and professional selves, and practitioners must be supported to maintain appropriate boundaries.

Practitioners to be aware of and articulate needs and preferences for wellbeing

Practitioners shared the importance of understanding their own wellbeing support preferences and, where possible, those of their colleagues, and supporting each other to advocate for them and maintain healthy routines and boundaries. They also shared that this was sometimes challenging in workplaces where funds and time for these practices were limited, and all staff members felt pressured to prioritise deliverables.

By implementing the lessons in this resource, we can transform the prevention sector into an environment where it is easier for individuals to monitor their needs and ask for wellbeing supports, creating a workplace culture where wellbeing and care is prioritised and celebrated.

Prevention practitioners working with multicultural and faith-based communities have a wealth of existing personal, cultural and political knowledge to draw from in embedding wellbeing and sustainability in their work. When organisations uplift and enshrine these practices, our sector and the communities we engage with will feel empowered to continue working together to create change and achieve our shared vision of a world free from violence.

📖 FURTHER READING

Chan, M. (2020). *Imagining Collective Care and Revisiting Ancestral Healing to Build Liberated Communities.* Fern Collective.

Changaira, L. (2022). *Supporting Bicultural Workers: A literature review.* cohealth. Collingwood.

Horn, J. (2019). *Self and collective care.* JASS, Furia & Raising Voices.

Lorde, A. (1988). *A Burst of Light: Essays*. Firebrand Books. Michigan.

Nader, L et. Al (2023). *How can we ground ourselves in care and dance our revolution?.* Urgent Action Fund. Colombia.

Nimri, N. (2022). *Self care is collective care is community care.* The Slow Factory.

Piepznia-Saramasinha, L.L (2018). *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice.* Arsenal Pulp Press. Vancouver.

Reynolds, V. (2011). *Resisting burnout with justice-doing.* The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work. (4) 27-45.

Reynolds, V. (2019). *The Zone of Fabulousness: Resisting vicarious trauma with connection, collective care and justice-doing in ways that centre the people we work alongside.* August 2019, Association for Family and Systemic Therapy, UK, 36-39.

ABOUT THE CONNECTING COMMUNITIES BRIEF GUIDES

The Connecting Communities network have expressed a need for short, concise and practical resources in topics relevant to their primary prevention work. The Connecting Communities guidance documents have been developed to meet this need, and the content in these guides have been informed by learnings shared from the network, as well as the existing evidence base. While these brief guides do not go into in-depth detail (we recommend referring to the reading list for more detailed information), we hope that they provide a useful point of reference not just for the network but for the broader prevention sector working with multicultural and faith-based communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Safe and Equal and Multicultural Centre for Women's Health are based on Wurundjeri Country. We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work and we pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters and community.

Connecting Communities is supported by the Victorian Government