

Are we getting better at providing culturally responsive alcohol and other drug treatment in Australia?

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Introduction: Twenty years ago, a major report highlighted the unmet need for drug and alcohol (AOD) treatment among culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Australia, yet treatment data each year continues to show under-servicing of these populations.

Abstract body text: Often low CALD engagement in AOD treatment is framed first and foremost as an individual or community deficit: CALD populations 'lack knowledge' about treatment options, or are 'too ashamed' to seek treatment, worried about consequent exclusion from family/community networks. We argue that this focus on alleged individual or community-level shortcomings obscures a failure by the sector to introduce sustained and holistic measures to improve cultural responsiveness. Various options for introducing systemic change in the sector are explored and considered from the perspectives of a range of stakeholders including CALD communities, researchers, treatment providers and service commissioners.

Discussions and Conclusions: Improving equity in access and treatment for CALD communities needs to take a more systemic approach. Different methods each have strengths and weaknesses, but remaining with our current approach will only ensure that we are again lamenting CALD under-representation within treatment in another 20 years. Looking beyond the sector, particularly to the lessons that efforts to improve Indigenous health in Australia can teach us, as well as considering international efforts suggests ways we can better target our resources and research efforts.

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