

# Evaluating the impact of the Cohealth Health Concierge program in public housing communities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Melbourne, Victoria

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**Background:** Since mid-2020, Cohealth, a primary healthcare provider organisation, has conducted a peer-to-peer Health Concierge (HC) health education program in high-rise buildings in public housing communities in Melbourne, Victoria, to support the residents. Many HC workers live in the communities they serve and aimed to help facilitate the public health pandemic response, including by promoting COVID-19 vaccine uptake. Our aim was to determine the impact of the HC program on residents' engagement with public health activities.

**Methods:** Convenience sampling was used to survey residents in Carlton, Collingwood, Flemington and North Melbourne public housing communities in April and May 2022. Qualitative interviews with residents, HC workers, Cohealth and Government staff were also conducted during March to May 2022.

**Results:** Of 301 surveyed residents, 71% were women and 38% spoke Somali at home. Three-quarters reported receiving information from a HC worker about COVID-19 vaccines and testing; most (>90%) thought this information was accurate. Around 80% of participants reported having moderate/very-high trust in COVID-19 vaccines. While 94% reported having  $\geq 2$  COVID-19 vaccines doses, 46% reported having the recommended  $\geq 3$  doses.

Data from 19 interviews indicates the HC program was valuable in facilitating rapidly changing public health responses to COVID-19 in these communities. Unmet community needs around addressing poor oral and mental health, language barriers and poverty were described. A key strength of the HC program is the ability of HC workers to become trusted sources of information and share information in languages spoken by residents.

**Conclusion:** The HC program may have helped increase residents' understanding and engagement with public health activities during the pandemic response. HC workers value their role and the career opportunities stemming from it. There is potential for HC workers to share information about a wider range of health and support services with their communities.

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