


# Mental health support for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) seniors

March, 2024

**wellways**





“The support of the Wellways worker was excellent. She took us to a mainstream service centre where I would not go by myself. I feel empowered as a person who just lost my husband. The social support map is a good guide for me [to know] who to reach out [to] after the program ends.”

# Table of contents

Contents	Page number
Executive summary	4
Introduction	5
Project objectives	6
Participant journey	7
Staff	9
Community Engagement	12
Governance	14
Evaluation	16
Challenges	25
Recommendations and insights	27
Appendices	29

# Executive Summary

The Wellways Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Seniors project recruited and trained three senior bi-cultural Recovery Workers to support Spanish and Tagalog-speaking community members with their mental health and wellbeing challenges.

Participants were referred to the program from bilingual GPs, prayer groups, seniors groups, churches and neighbourhood houses, as well as people self-referred after hearing of the program via word-of-mouth and social media. The top presenting concerns were social isolation, physical health challenges, persistent worry and low mood.

After engaging in coaching with the Recovery Workers between December, 2023 and February, 2024, the participants' self-reported wellbeing improved on all five CHIME domains, they reported that the support was beneficial and their participation made a difference to their mental health and wellbeing.

The participants were referred to long term supports for their mental health and wellbeing needs, including mental health services, carer services, physical health providers, as well as leisure and social connection groups based on the participants plan and goals identified.

The Recovery Workers reported that their capacity to support their community with mental health and wellbeing challenges has improved as a result of the training delivered over two weeks, as well as the supervision and support received through working in the program.

The program demonstrated that the Senior bi-cultural workers were able to support the mental health and wellbeing challenges experienced in their community and their employment improved their capacity to provide this support in the long-term. There is significant unmet mental health and wellbeing need in these communities and a sustainable program to address this is recommended.



# Introduction

COVID-19 significantly impacted the mental health and wellbeing of many citizens, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. National Seniors Australia ran the “*Assertive COVID-19 Outreach into New and Emerging CALD Communities*” project to support people who were socially isolated and to increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake. The support workers of this program and community elders reported that seniors from a Filipino and Spanish-speaking background in the west of Melbourne experienced issues such as elder abuse, isolation and mental health challenges that remained unaddressed.

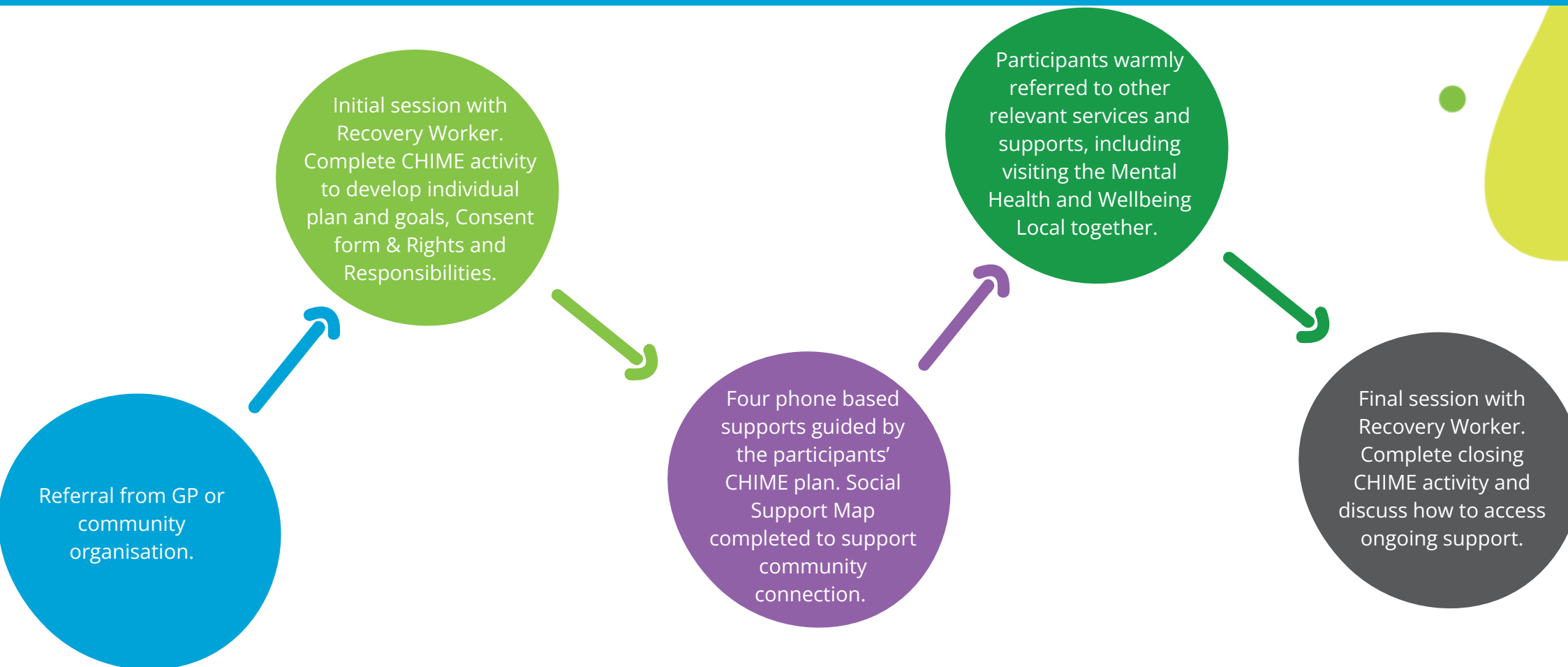
There is significant stigma associated with mental health challenges in Spanish speaking and Filipino communities, which can lead to denial, deferred help-seeking, delayed diagnosis and access to support. Wellways was funded by the the Western Metropolitan Partnership through the Metropolitan Partnership Development Fund (MPDF) to appoint three bi-cultural Recovery Workers to provide coaching to thirty Seniors that speak Tagalog and Spanish to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of these participants.

# Project Objectives

The project aimed to:

- Recruit, train and support bi-cultural Recovery Workers to identify and support people with mental health and wellbeing challenges.
- Improve the quality of life and reduce psychological distress for Seniors from a Spanish speaking and Filipino background.
- Provide tools and warm referrals to long term supports for the Seniors to manage their mental health.
- Increase the capacity in the longer term for the Recovery Workers to support people with mental health challenges in the region through the training and development obtained in the program.

# Participant Journey



Each participant was called after the final session to check if they had the appropriate supports in place and to offer an opportunity to provide feedback.



## Coaching Model

The CHIME Framework supports personal recovery and is a suitable coaching model to support older adults from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This model engages with concepts of wellbeing and community engagement, while steering away from potentially stigmatising and pathologising people with sickness and mental illness concepts. The tools, used in Wellways' Helpline Service, were adapted so that they could be interpreted effectively by the Recovery Workers.

**C**onnection  
**H**ope  
**I**ntity  
**M**eaning  
**E**mpowerment

Participants assess how they are going in each CHIME domain with a score out of five, so that a collaborative plan about their support needs can be developed. This tool was completed again at the end of the engagement in order to make a plan for maintaining improvements and to ensure referrals were in place for further supports required.

A Social Support Map was also completed with the participant to map their supports and identify if more support were required.

# Staff

Bi-cultural Recovery Workers (hereafter referred to as Recovery Workers) use their language skills, community connections, cultural knowledge and lived experience to support people to access mental health and wellbeing supports and services.

The successful candidates were selected on the basis of their prominent engagement and leadership within the communities of interest. All staff recruited to this project also had some form of involvement with the *“Assertive COVID-19 Outreach into New and Emerging CALD Communities”* project delivered by National Seniors Australia (two as workers and one as a consumer/participant). All workers in the program were seniors; one Recovery Worker spoke Tagalog, one spoke Spanish and one spoke both languages.

## Staff profiles



### **Senior Bilingual Recovery Worker**

Norma, the Senior Recovery Worker, has been a volunteer in the Filipino Community for 30 years, since moving to Australia from the Philippines. This work included a period of service as Chair of the Filipino Community Council of Victoria. She worked as a Team Leader at National Seniors Australia and also worked as a sales manager and as a manager for Filipino community aged care services. Norma speaks Tagalog and Spanish, amongst other languages.

### **Spanish Bilingual Recovery Worker**

Cecilia, the Spanish-speaking Recovery Worker, has been a volunteer for the Spanish-speaking community for 23 years, since migrating to Australia from El Salvador. Her leadership positions include President of the Foundation Salvadorian Communities in Australia. Cecilia has worked in diverse community engagement roles, including as Electorate Officer for different State Members of Parliament, and a domestic violence organisation, supporting asylum seekers and seniors.

### **Tagalog Bilingual Recovery Worker**

Belen, the Tagalog-speaking Recovery Worker, has held a range of volunteer and paid positions supporting migrant communities since moving from the Philippines to Australia. She is a Social Enterprise Production team member at Sisterworks, a not-for-profit organization supporting women who are refugees, asylum seekers and migrants to improve confidence, wellbeing, community belonging and social outlook. Belen is an inspirational speaker and her other affiliations include the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Filipino Community Council of Victoria, Luzviminda Filipino Women's Group, Wyndham Women Support Group and Couples for Christ Australia.



## Training & Supervision

Training was pivotal to support the Recovery Workers as they had not previously provided mental health and wellbeing support. A novel training program was developed and delivered over two weeks.

### Training delivered by Wellways

- Working Well Together: Wellways' Practice Principles
- Motivational Interviewing
- CHIME Framework
- Understanding Boundaries
- Referral Pathways
- Stages of Change

### Training from external sources

- Trauma Informed Practice from Phoenix Australia
- Suicide Prevention for Older Adults from Anglicare

Line Management Supervision and Clinical Supervision was undertaken regularly by Amanjot Sandhu and Vivienne Schwab to support skill development, reflective practice, confidence and competence.

# Community engagement

The Recovery Workers engaged with bilingual GPs and a wide variety of community organisations to promote the program and invite referrals. A program flyer was developed and distributed to potential referrers.

The Recovery Workers were able to utilise their existing affiliations to efficiently promote the program widely amongst organisations that support the target communities. In addition, workers also made contact with participants of the National Seniors project who had been flagged as still requiring support to ask if they wanted to participate.

With assistance of the Wellways Marketing Team, the Recovery Workers also used their considerable online community presence to promote the program on social media.

The Recovery Workers also established referral pathways from this program to provide warm referrals into longer-term mental health, wellbeing, community and carer services for participants requiring it.



## Groups and organisations engaged

Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local  
Brimbank City Council

My Aged Care

Three local Tagalog and Spanish-speaking GPs

Mid West Alliance (local mental health service  
network alliance)

Ilonggo Association (organisation for Filipino  
seniors)

Power of Devotion Prayer Group (Filipino prayer  
group)

Filipino Seniors Council

LUDZVIMINDA Senior Women's Group

Ambassadors Club of Australia

Filipino Australian Senior Citizens of Victoria

Penrose Community Centre

Latino American Women's Association of  
Victoria

Chilean Club of Victoria

West Sunshine Multicultural Spanish Senior  
Citizens Group Inc.

Afghan Community in the Eastern Suburbs

The Coffee Table (Torres Strait Islander  
women's group)

Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect Centre

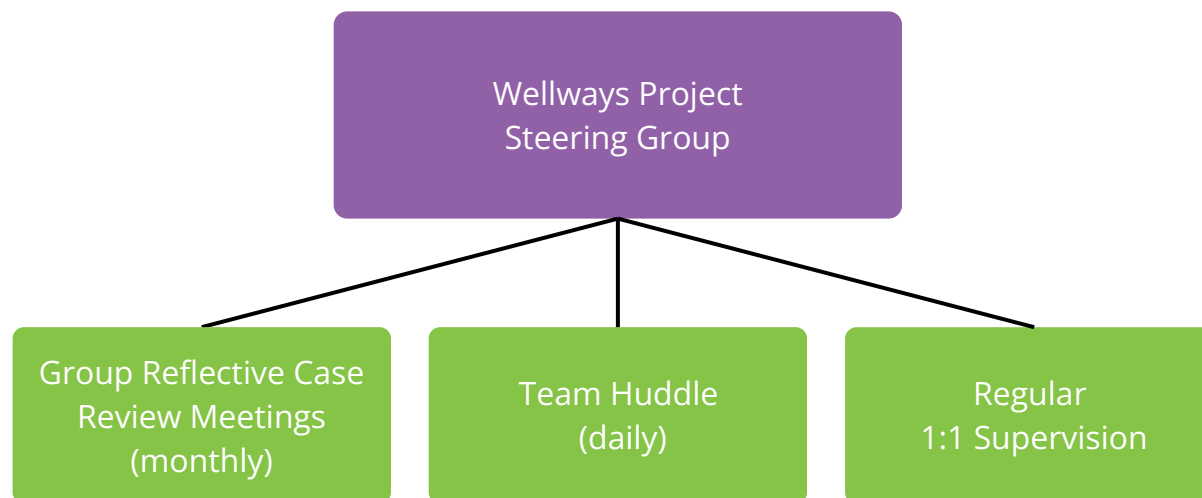
Older Person's Advocacy Network

Brotherhood of St Laurence (NDIS LAC)

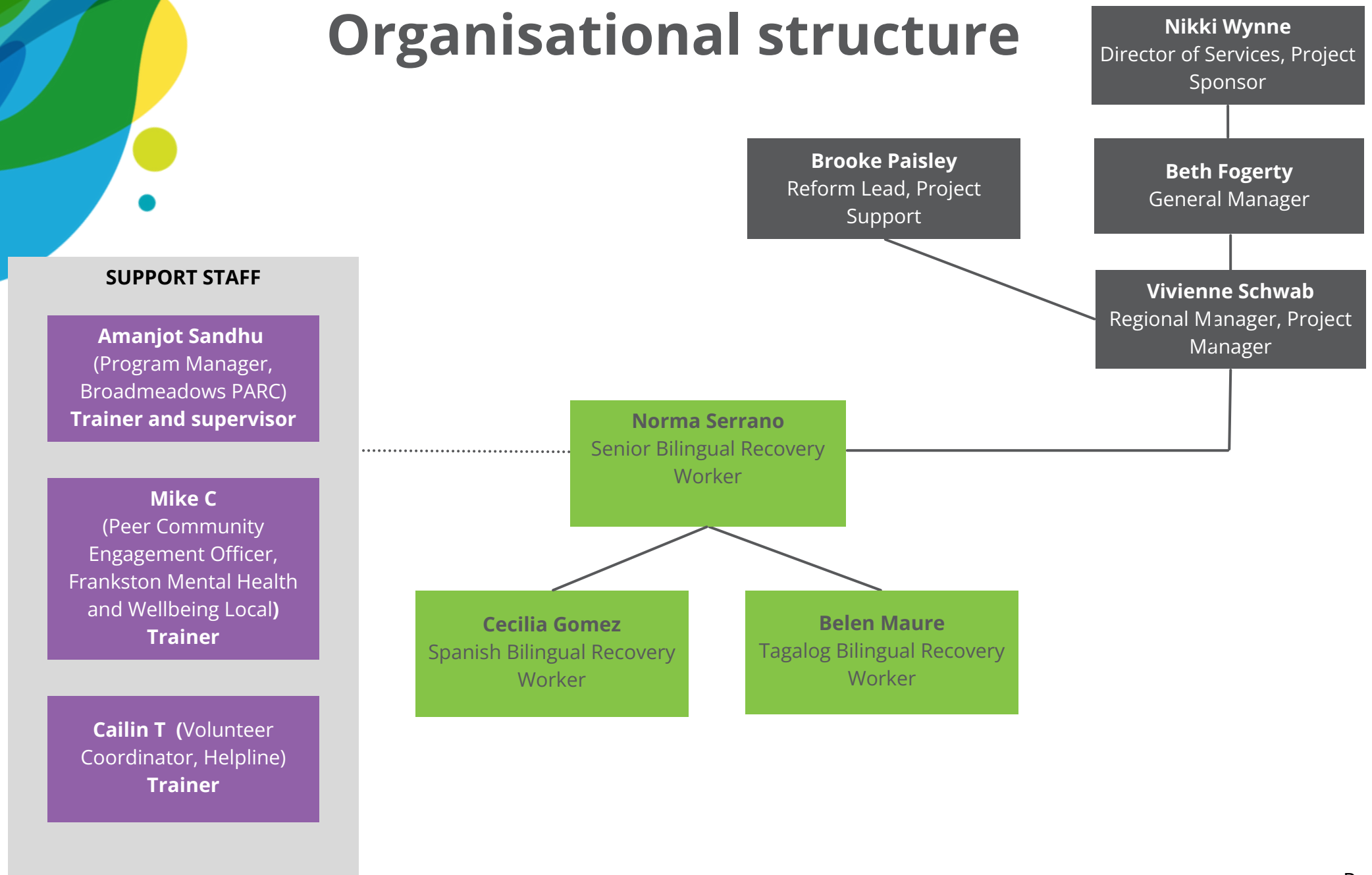
IPC Health

# Governance

## Internal governance



# Organisational structure



# Evaluation

Thirty-five seniors participated in this program; 28 were female and seven were male.

The participant's ages ranged from 60 to 88, with an average age of 73 years of age.

Twenty-four participants were born in the Philippines, five in Chile, two in El Salvador, two in Uruguay, one in Argentina and one was born in Bolivia.

The number of contacts (phone calls and in person support) with participants ranged from three to seven and the average number of contacts was 5.6. Each contact took an average of one hour.

The Recovery Workers were trained and delivered the program over 554.8 hours in total. This included their orientation, community engagement, capacity building, administration, supporting the project evaluation and direct participant support activities.

## Referral sources

Referrals were received from a wide variety of organisations and groups, including local bilingual GPs working with the target communities, prayer groups, seniors groups, churches and neighbourhood houses. There were also four participants that self-referred via word of mouth or social media promotion.

Organisation/Referral Source	Total participants referred
Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local	2
Local Tagalog and Spanish-speaking GPs	5
Ilonggo Association (organisation for Filipino seniors)	2
Power of Devotion Prayer group (Filipino prayer group)	6
Filipino Seniors Council	4
Penrose Community Centre	1
Latino American Women's Association of Victoria	2
Chilean Club of Victoria	1
West Sunshine Multicultural Spanish Senior Citizens Group Inc.	3
Jesuit Social Services Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect Centre	1
National Seniors	3
St Peter the Apostle Church	1
Self-referred (word of mouth , social media or flyer)	4



## **Presenting concerns**

The top presenting concerns for participants were:

- social isolation (n = 26)
- physical health difficulties (n = 25)
- persistent worry (n = 24)
- low mood (n = 21)
- fatigue/exhaustion (n = 18).

Thirteen participants were carers that had no formal supports for their caring role and ten of these reported experiencing carer burnout.

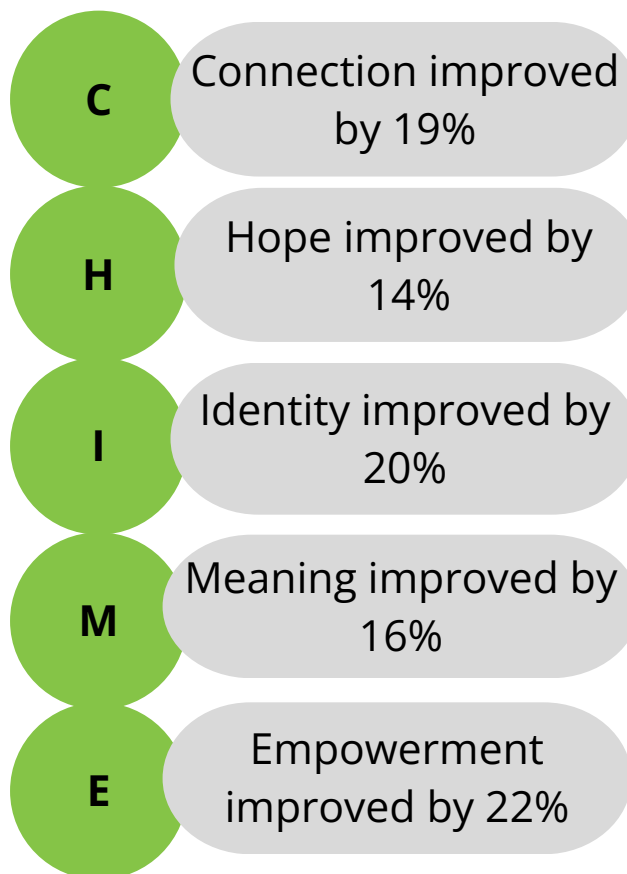
**Perception of  
wellbeing:  
CHIME scores**

**Connection**  
**Hope**  
**Identity**  
**Meaning**  
**Engagement**

CHIME domains	Score at the start of the engagement	Score at the end of the engagement	Difference in score
Connection	3.3	4.2	.9
Hope	3.6	4.3	.7
Identity	3	4	1
Meaning	3.4	4.2	.8
Empowerment	3.2	4.3	1.1
Average CHIME	3.3	4.2	.9

All five CHIME domains showed an improvement from the start of the engagement to the end of the engagement with participants.

**Perception of  
wellbeing:  
CHIME scores**



While this was a short program (six contacts in total), all participant's self-rated perceived wellbeing improved, with an average improvement of 18.2% over the course of the program.



## Referrals Made

Participants were referred to a number of appropriate mental health services, carer supports, physical health services, as well as leisure and social connection groups based on their individual plan and goals identified.

Organisation	Participants referred
Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local (inc Carers' Support Group)	33
Brimbank City Council computer classes	4
My Aged Care	24
Carer Gateway	13
Filipino Seniors Council	3
Latino American Women's Association of Victoria	3
West Sunshine Multicultural Spanish Senior Citizens Group Inc.	4
Jesuit Social Services Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect Centre	2
Older Person's Advocacy Network	1
Brotherhood of St Laurence (NDIS LAC)	3
IPC Health	3
Ambassadors Club of Australia (dance classes)	2
LUDZVIMINDA Senior Women's Dancing Group	5
Holy Eucharist Church - Zumba classes	2



## Building capacity in the community

### Community presentations

In order to support mental health and wellbeing for other CALD groups in the region, the Senior Recovery Worker presented information about mental health and carers supports available to other CALD community groups in the region. This included a group for Afghan women, a group for Burmese seniors and a Torres Straight Islander women's coffee group.

### Capacity building for the Recovery Workers

Recovery Workers continue to use their mental health training and knowledge of the local service system gained through this program in their volunteer roles.

“  
I am now more equipped with knowledge about mental health and can continue providing awareness and information sessions with the CALD community...  
”

"The regular phone calls helped me alleviate my loneliness because I have someone to talk to, and speak the language, plus the worker being a senior she can easily understand where I am coming from. I am happy to know where to refer my family members who have mental health challenges as well."

"I learnt that I am not alone and not the only one suffering from mental health. You have shown me there is a light at the end of the tunnel.... The support and guidance given to me was very professionally and culturally delivered. Confidentiality and respect was appreciated"

## Participant Feedback

"It was a great experience for me to be part of this program. I didn't know what to do with my life, I was feeling lost. When I was contacted and explained what the program was about, I felt so happy and knowing that I was going to have someone to talk to without any judgement or neglect. The worker was very patient and professional. Now I am engaged with different service providers I can reach out for support."

"The program is a big help to seniors like me. Reaching out to us via phone calls on a regular basis tends to replace our longing for our children who are busy with their own lives and families. The worker knows how to deal with senior because she is a senior herself and the trust is not an issue."

## Participant Feedback

Feedback questions	Average self-rated score (1 = very poor, 5 = excellent)
What was it like to be part of this program? What was your experience like? Rate your experience from 1 to 5.	4.8
Do you feel that the program made a difference to your mental health and wellbeing? Rate your experience from 1 to 5.	4.8
Did you find the support from staff helpful? Rate your experience from 1 to 5.	4.9

# Challenges

## **Onboarding**

The Recovery Workers commencement was delayed as they had challenges in obtaining compliance documents and then uploading the required documents into the Wellways' online recruitment program. A Recruitment Advisor and Project Manager supported the staff by delivering one-to-one support over the phone, in person and manually uploading documents to the system. In future, this individualised support should be offered for Recovery Workers.

## **Information and communication technology (ICT)**

The level of ICT familiarity and capability of staff varied and was at times a barrier to completing some administrative tasks for the project. Training was helpful in building the workers' capability, however additional resources were required to assist with record keeping, such as bringing in a worker from another program to upload documents to the Carelink system. In future ongoing ICT training is recommended for Recovery Workers and individualised support offered.

## **Complex Service Environment**

The support service system within the local area is complex, particularly for carer supports. Familiarity and understanding how to support warm referrals is challenging for seasoned workers and the community, let alone staff largely unfamiliar with the sector. In future, documented service mapping may have supported the Recovery Workers to navigate the complex system quicker.

## **Coaching Model**

The initial coaching model identified was unable to be used as it was a proprietary product and this delayed project commencement as an alternative was found and successfully adapted. A support model based on the CHIME framework was effective for working with CALD Seniors due to the focus on connection, hope and meaning, and it was able to be easily interpreted by the Recovery Workers.

## **Understanding boundaries**


Staff were appointed due to their regular engagement in a wide variety of volunteer activities to support their communities, but this meant that firm guidance needed to be provided about how to support community members in a professional capacity in order to maintain confidentiality and comply with Wellways policies and procedures.

A novel training package was developed by a Peer Community Engagement Officer working in a Mental Health and Wellbeing Local to build workers' understanding of scope of support in this program. This will be a permanent feature of the Wellways Training and Development suite.

In addition, a work phone was provided so that calls would not be received outside of hours (with an out of hours message with emergency contact details). Supporting staff to maintain professional boundaries was also a regular focus in supervision.

# Recommendations and insights

- Isolation and loneliness is experienced by many culturally and linguistically diverse seniors and this impacts on their mental health and wellbeing. Participants reported that regular calls with the Recovery Workers was an important connection for them.
- Many senior people that speak Spanish and Tagalog have a different understanding of mental health challenges and often there is stigma associated with it. As the Recovery Workers were seniors themselves, as well as being bicultural, they were able to use their cultural knowledge, breadth of community connections, language skills and lived experience to create trust and connection. A future project to engage seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds should consider recruiting Recovery Workers that are senior in age and life experience.
- Many people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds do not know what services are available for mental health and wellbeing support and their rights for accessing them. Having Recovery Workers to help participants to navigate this complex system and in some instances attend mainstream services with them (like the Mental Health and Wellbeing Local) helps to improve engagement.
- The mental health and wellbeing challenges faced by these communities is significant. Long-term sustainable support is required to address this.



"There is a high percentage of people suffering from mental health in the Spanish Community and suffering alone because of the stigma. There is a need to implement long term and sustainable programs to support these people, short programs are not enough."

- Spanish-speaking GP in Brimbank.

"I would like to reiterate the value of the senior workers coming from the grassroot level. Our seniors are open to discuss with us freely how they feel about their mental health issues because of the trust to their existing community leaders. Grassroots members are very important for these sorts of programs as they are the ones who know the needs and cultural issues. Because they are already working with the communities, trust is already built." - Recovery Worker.





# Appendices



# Program Flyer

Developed by the Recovery Workers to support referrals.

## Wellbeing Support in Brimbank



Offering free, local, and personalised wellbeing support to Spanish-speaking and Filipino seniors

If you or someone you know is a Filipino or Spanish-speaking senior citizen residing in Brimbank, please reach out to us for free mental health and wellbeing support.

Our services include:

- Assisting with support and services tailored to your individual requirements
- Providing a safe space where you can openly discuss the joys, challenges, and stresses of life

Providing the assistance of a bilingual worker who can help you access other services

- Offering coaching sessions aimed at enhancing your overall quality of life.

**Program duration:** Commencing Monday 18th December 2023 to 29th February 2024  
**Number of sessions:** 6

**Location:** Phone-based services in Brimbank area

**Additional information:** If you would like to have a detailed discussion, please contact

the following individuals for phone-based services in the Brimbank area:

• **Tagalog:** Norma Serrano at 0403 689 903 (available on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays) or email [nserrano@wellways.org](mailto:nserrano@wellways.org)

• **Spanish:** Cecilia Gomez at 0421 754 540 (available on Mondays and Tuesdays) or email [cgomez@wellways.org](mailto:cgomez@wellways.org)

**wellways**

[wellways.org](http://wellways.org) | 1300 111 400

WI769 11/12/23 v1

# The team



Team members (L to R): Amanjot Sandhu, Belen Maure, Norma Serrano, Cecilia Gomez and Vivienne Schwab.



# Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local visit

December 19, 2023.





# Social Media



This is an amazing initiative for the CaLD community [Brooke Paisley](#)



**Brooke Paisley** (She/Her) • You  
Organisational Lead • Leadership • Focused on strategic partnerships with a d...  
3w •

It was wonderful to connect with some of the team at the Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local service today.

...see more



[Shane Gatley](#) and 11 others

1 comment • 1 repost



**Brooke Paisley** (She/Her) • You  
Organisational Lead • Leadership • Focused on strategic partnerships wi...  
1mo •

It was wonderful to connect with some of the team at the Brimbank Mental Health and Wellbeing Local service today.

[Wellways Australia](#) are running a program over the next few months where CALD Recovery Workers are supporting people of Filipino and Spanish-speaking backgrounds in the west of Melbourne with their mental health and wellbeing through short-term coaching. If required, participants will be warmly referred to long-term services like the Local and connections with other community agencies for their ongoing needs.

The Brimbank Local is a warm, inviting space and the staff are passionate about providing reformed mental health services. Thank you for connecting, talking about how we can work together to support this community and taking us on a tour.

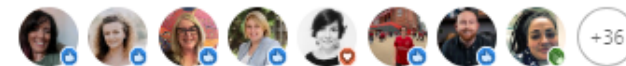
Thank you to [cohealth](#), [Clarity Health Care](#), Brett and the team.



[Jo-Anne Otten](#) and 43 others

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Reactions



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Wellways respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of Australia.  
We are committed to inclusive communities and the contribution of lived and living experience in mental health.