



Cancer Support for People of Refugee Background

Analysis, education and support to improve the cancer journey: Nov 2022 - Jan 2026

This project began working with Bendigo Karen and Afghan communities, and service providers in November 2022, to identify the enablers, barriers, and myths surrounding cancer, prevention, cancer care, and refugee sensitive practice.

Bendigo is home to approximately 3500 Karen and 300 Afghan refugees. Humanitarian arrivals often arrive with limited preventative and primary care knowledge, and limited health, service, and digital literacy, having experienced decades of deprivation.

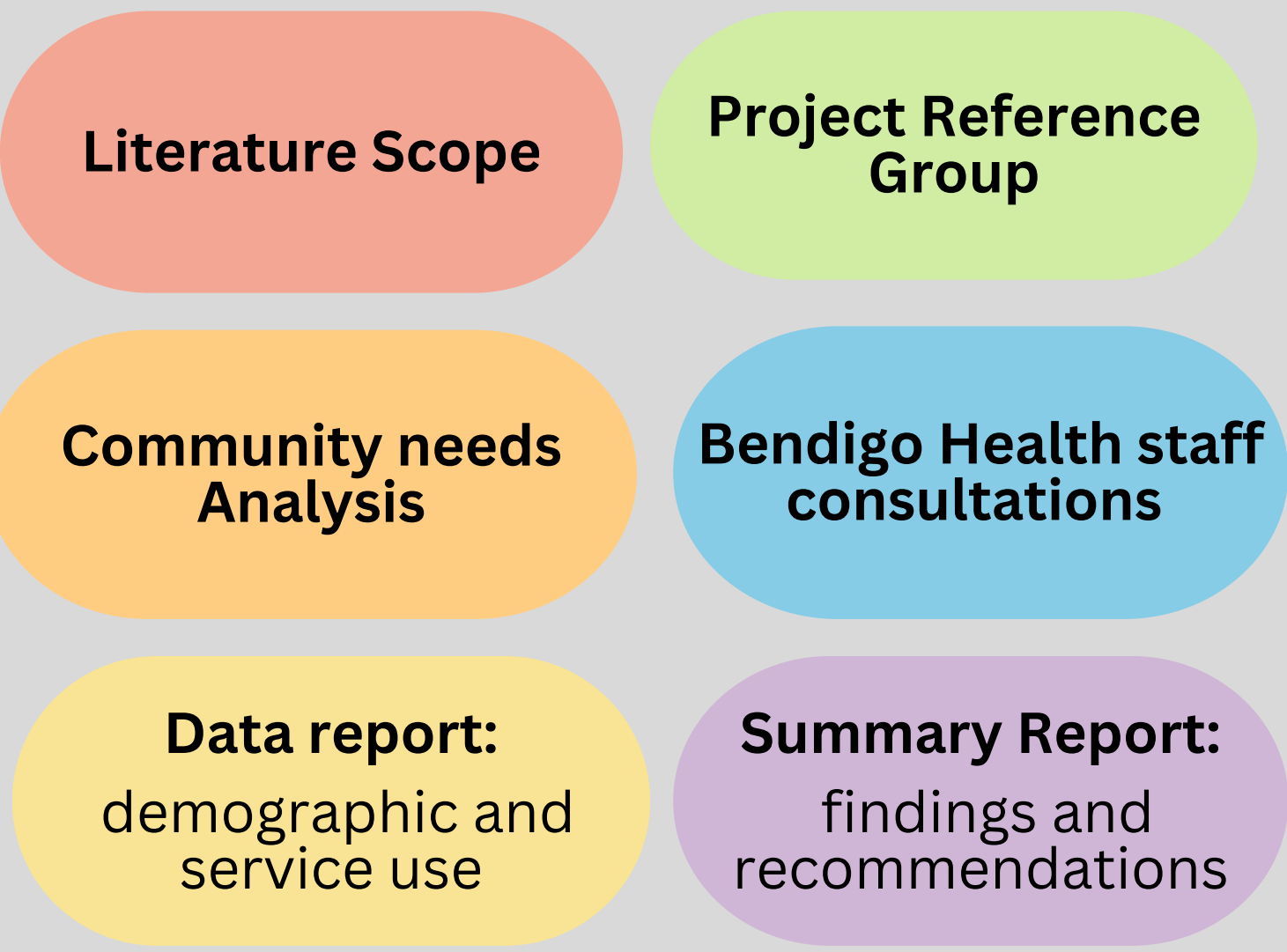
The project, in partnership with Loddon Mallee Integrated Cancer Services (LMICS) and Bendigo Regional Cancer Centre arose after Bendigo Community Health Services (BCHS) staff noticed increased advanced cancer diagnosis and poor service engagement within the community.

Aim

Cancer support for people of refugee background, Bendigo (CSPRBB) aims to improve health equity across the cancer continuum by supporting former refugees to better understand cancer, prevention, early intervention, and create optimal care pathways that are culturally safe and easily understood.



What we did to inform project design:



Preliminary findings

Community Needs Analysis

9 focus groups: 128 participants

- Fear and reluctance to screen without support.
- Limitations in 'understanding our bodies' and symptom recognition.
- Language & communication: individual and structural barriers.
- Existing cancer resources too complex.

'Everyone [with cancer] will die, so there is no point getting treated' - extreme fatalism based on experiences in refugee camp/ like settings.

'I can handle the pain, but I cannot handle being ashamed' - feeling misunderstood by service providers.

Service Provider Challenges

- A lack of appropriate in-language patient information.
- Limited cultural awareness of refugee communities.
- Reported lack of patient engagement and difficulty communicating with diverse consumers.
- Interpreter availability and competence with complex concepts and terminology.

Current Work with Community

Targeted cancer care training: BCHS bi-cultural staff, BH interpreters and key community leaders.

Co-design and production of new in-language print and audio-visual cancer resources.

Simplification and translation of existing cancer resources with peak bodies: screening through to end-of-life care.

Development of a pilot cancer navigation model: BCHS bi-cultural staff supporting patients throughout their cancer journey.

Facilitating in-language cancer education sessions: 39 sessions, with 412 participants.

Uptake of knowledge - 99%
Intention to use knowledge - 92%

'...cancer cannot be cured, you get it and you die. Now I know we can find changes early and get fixed easier' - session participant.

'we know it is easier for treatment if we find the cancer when it is small' - session participant

Current Work with Health Providers

Supporting alternate access models: screening, palliative care and cancer center.

Simplifying and translating existing **patient resources**.

Co-designing and producing new in-language print and audio-visual patient cancer resources.

Professional Development opportunities: to build refugee sensitive practice. 5 sessions to date: 52 Bendigo Cancer Centre staff.

Identifying and implementing system improvements within cancer care services.

Future Directions

- Refine screening booking and recall systems to enable rescreening.
- Test effectiveness and broader application of project model in other settlement sites, and cancer systems and services.
- **Embed prevention, and cancer care navigation** into the National Settlement Program:
 - including **Refugee Health Assessments** on arrival.



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