

Abstract Form

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Title of abstract: Equity in Practice – the Importance of Community Engagement

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Background:

Metro Assist has delivered two localised campaigns promoting breast and cervical screening to women in CALD communities. While broader messaging is important in raising the topic, direct community engagement has been the most effective way of delivering education on complex and sensitive health issues and influencing behavior in culturally diverse communities.

Aims:

Both campaigns aim to raise awareness and participation rates in breast and cervical screening; topics which present significant challenges because of personal, cultural and religious sensitivities, as misconceptions associated with cancer. However, both projects highlight a strong demand for knowledge around cancer, causes, preventions and treatment. Tension arises in whether more knowledge is enough to overcome those barriers and take up screening. Direct community engagement has been effective in quenching the thirst for knowledge and mobilising women in peer groups to undertake breast screening, and it's too early to tell whether the same applies to cervical screening.

Method:

Direct engagement with multicultural and ethnic organisations helped raise the discourse, explore behaviors, understand motivators to overcome barriers, shape messaging and identify communication channels. Using ethnic media provided a platform for bilingual GPs and health professionals to address knowledge gaps and extend the reach of the campaigns so that women did not feel they were being spoken to in isolation. Collaboration with services: BreastScreen NSW, Local Health Districts and PHNs provided the expertise and support infrastructure that helps normalise and legitimise cancer screening as an important and potentially life-saving activity for all women.

Results:

While the breast screening project's evaluation is in progress, early signs show that direct community engagement is making a profound mark in women's understanding of cancer prevention, screening and treatments improved participation in screening. We are hopeful that a similar approach will deliver results for the even more sensitive discussion around cervical screening.

Implications that impact on your project:

Community engagement is time and labor intensive because it is built on developing working collaborations with diverse stakeholders and women at a grassroots level. It needs a sustainable momentum to influence knowledge, attitudinal and behavioral change. Sustained investment is needed to ensure that women in culturally diverse communities have an equitable standing in this life-saving work.