

Perinatal mental health of women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

A guide for primary care health professionals

Women from CALD backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to developing emotional distress or mental health disorders in the perinatal period and they often do not receive the care they need.¹



BACKGROUND

Australia has a culturally and linguistically diverse population with approximately 27 per cent (six million) of the estimated resident population of Australia being born overseas.² In 2010, 28.1 per cent of women who gave birth in Australia were born in countries other than Australia.³ In the coming years, Australia's population is likely to remain strongly multicultural, multi-faith and multi-lingual.

For many, migration to Australia is a choice, while others are forced to flee from their country of origin. People migrate for a variety of reasons, such as to study, to seek work, or to avoid political or religious persecution. Migration experiences vary significantly for each person.

MIGRATION, THE WELLBEING OF MOTHERS, INFANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES AND HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Promoting the emotional and mental health of all women in the perinatal period enhances the general health and wellbeing of both mothers and infants.⁴ There is increasing evidence linking maternal stress with adverse fetal outcomes and negative effects on child health and development.⁵ However, early identification and appropriate management during this crucial period can have significant benefits for the mother, infant and other family members.

Particular challenges facing immigrant families include:

- learning a new language
- adjusting to new ways of life and carrying out everyday tasks in an unfamiliar environment
- financial hardship, unemployment and housing difficulties
- social isolation and the absence of usual female family supports
- experiencing discrimination based on race or ethnicity
- understanding and navigating health, education and other social services.

¹ *beyondblue*, 2011; Collins, Zimmerman & Howard, 2011; O'Mahony, Donnelly, Boucahl & Este, 2012

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012

³ Li, Zeki, Hilder & Sullivan, 2012

⁴ *beyondblue*, 2011

⁵ Buss, Entringer, Swanson & Wadhwa, 2012