

MEDIA RELEASE

15 February 2019

Pharmacy Waiver Program launches in Epping

Critical support for people seeking asylum living in Whittlesea and Hume is now available through a new Pharmacy Waiver Program, launched today by Member for Thomastown Bronwyn Halfpenny MP.

The Pharmacy Waiver Program will provide eligible clients with authorisation (a waiver) to have the costs associated with filling their prescription charged to Cabrini Outreach.

The Program has been made possible through a partnership between Cabrini Outreach and Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC).

There are 1,116 people seeking asylum in Whittlesea and 551 people seeking asylum in Hume originating mainly from Iran, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Their health needs include high levels of chronic pain, non-communicable diseases, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Recent changes to the Federal Government's Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) program have resulted in people seeking asylum gaining work rights but losing income support while they are awaiting the outcome of their claim for protection.

Whittlesea Community Connections CEO Alex Haynes said the changes to the SRSS would leave many people seeking asylum struggling to support themselves.

"We anticipate that many people seeking asylum will have difficulty finding work, resulting in a high risk of homelessness and destitution," Ms Haynes said.

"We hope this program will help to improve the health and wellbeing of people seeking asylum in this region."

Cabrini Outreach General Manager Tom Roth said there was little point in general practitioners (GPs) prescribing medication people seeking asylum could not afford.

"One of the first effects of having no income is the inability to fill pharmacy scripts. The ability to have medical scripts filled, free of charge, will ease the burden for many of these people seeking asylum."

Mr Roth said the program was designed to enable people seeking asylum to maintain a primary care relationship with their GP.

"Many people seeking asylum already have an established relationship with a culturally-appropriate general practitioner," he said.

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“The Pharmacy Waiver Program is designed to enable these clients to maintain that primary care relationship, which is imperative to maintaining their health and wellbeing.”

Mr Roth said the program had been adapted from a similar program established by Cabrini Outreach in Brunswick.

“We have seen first-hand the benefits this program can achieve and are excited to be able to expand it to Whittlesea and Hume,” he said.

Member for Thomastown Bronwyn Halfpenny MP, representing the Health Minister Jenny Mikakos, said the program filled a growing need in the community.

“This is a tremendous initiative that offers vital assistance to some of our most marginalised community members,” Ms Halfpenny said.

“Providing this pharmacy waiver ensures that people seeking asylum living in Whittlesea and Hume can still access vital medication, regardless of their income.

“The Victorian Government is committed to achieving better health outcomes for all Victorians and works closely with the health and community sector to improve access for people seeking asylum. The Pharmacy Waiver Program will make a valuable contribution in supporting people seeking asylum access the services they need.”

The service will operate from Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) in the Pacific Epping Shopping Centre from mid-February on Mondays and Fridays, the same days as WCC’s Emergency Relief Program, allowing people seeking asylum access to multiple services under the one roof.

The Program has been supported by an establishment grant from the Hume Whittlesea Primary Care Partnership. Program administration and the cost of medications will be funded by Cabrini Outreach while WCC will contribute accommodation, reception support and screening of clients.

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