

Inner South East Partnership in Community and Health (ISEPICH)

The Health and Wellbeing of International Students in the Inner South East



Final report of a consultation project

July 2010

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- Students involved in organising the international student lunch at Swinburne in 2009 (ISEPICH and the City of Port Phillip provided some financial support for this lunch)
- The City of Port Phillip Multicultural Liaison Officer

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Executive Summary

International education has grown significantly in Australia over the last 10 years. However, recently there has been increasing awareness that the experience of International students is not always a positive one.

The Inner South East Partnership in Community and Health (ISEPICH) was interested to gain a better understanding of the experiences of international students in this area. The ISEPICH catchment (the municipalities of Stonnington, Port Phillip and Glen Eira) includes three major tertiary institutions: Swinburne University and TAFE campus in Prahran and Holmesglen TAFE in Chadstone, both in the Stonnington municipality, and Monash University Caulfield campus in Caulfield, in Glen Eira municipality.

A third year RMIT student (Felicity Smith) on placement with ISEPICH conducted a consultation project to explore issues facing international students this area during 2009. The project had three components

- Literature review
- Consultations with key informants and stakeholders
- Two focus groups with international students

Eleven international students participated in the focus groups. Nine either lived or went to University/TAFE in the inner south east region. They ranged in age from 19 to 38 years. Nine were female, two male. Four were from China, two from India, two from Malaysia, one from Japan, one from South Africa and one from Mongolia. Two participants were completing a University based course, one a Masters degree and one an undergraduate degree. The other nine were completing a Diploma at a TAFE institution. One participant had also completed secondary school in Melbourne. The eleven participants had been living in Australia between three months and three years.

Key themes which emerged from the focus groups were:

- Concern over discrimination and racism
- Difficulties in finding affordable and appropriate housing
- Difficulties associated with work and employment
- Homesickness, isolation and difficulties in adapting
- Lifestyle and safety issues (positive and negative)
- Limited access to health services
- The cost of public transport and tuition fees
- Issues regarding Permanent Residency
- Food and nutrition, including the cost of food
- Positive experiences of support services at Swinburne University

Inner city accommodation is very packed, I think more than ten students in the house I had to stay in.

At my restaurant there were two different wages, one for Australian, local students, local people and one for Japanese students.

The themes from the focus groups reflected the findings from the literature review and a number of major reports and enquiries that were published after the project concluded.

Recommendations

Supporting national and state action

A number of recent reports (Senate Committee 2010; Baird 2010; Babacan et al 2010) have called for measures to promote the welfare of international students. We recommend that ISEPICH member agencies support these actions through advocacy, and, where relevant, local action.

The reports call for:

- More information on personal safety, housing options and legal rights to be provided to international students. The information should be readily accessible, in appropriate languages and available to students before they come to Australia as well while they are here.
- Mechanisms to protect students' rights. The Senate Committee (2010) recommended that the Commonwealth Ombudsman's jurisdiction should be extended to cover international students and the Baird report calls for the Fair Work Ombudsman to continue outreach programs to international students.
- A review of the working restrictions on international students, and less harsh penalties for accidental breaches.
- A better regulated education sector.
- Access to transport concessions for students in NSW and Victoria (other states already allow this), and a whole of government approach to safety on public transport.
- The report by Babacan et al (2010, p 4) recommends that discrimination and racism be specifically acknowledged by relevant authorities, particularly governments, and that these bodies "need to position themselves as advocates for the elimination of racism". The report also calls for more research and proactive community policing by Victoria police, and suggests ethnic community organisations could also provide more support for students.
- The Baird report (2010) also calls for the establishment of student hubs in all capital cities (the City of Melbourne is already active in this area).
- The reports do not generally address in detail the issues of access to health services but the Baird report does call for broader health insurance to be made available to students.

Local action

At the local level we recommend that ISEPICH agencies consider initiatives such as those by City of Melbourne, which include student welcome and other events, guides and resources (see

<http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/CommunityServices/ForYouth/InternationalStudents/Pages/Internationalstudents.aspx>) and the City of Darebin, (see http://www.darebin.vic.gov.au/page/page.asp?Page_id=7370)

Education providers clearly play a key role in promoting social inclusion and creating support networks for International students. Local governments, community organisations and service providers can make links and create relationships with Universities and TAFEs to further develop support networks for international students.

Agencies can also develop policies and programs on how they can serve international students, including policies on access to services for international students.

Some examples of local action include:

- The City of Stonnington's Youth Services in partnership with Council's Aged and Diversity Department will launch a new brochure titled, '**A Guide For International Students - Put It In Your Pocket**' in August 2010. The brochure will include information on a range of low cost services that can assist students with information relating to their legal rights, health, support & counselling, looking for somewhere to live and will also include local Council services.
- The City of Stonnington's Youth Service offers a generalist youth service that provides individual support, a supervised Drop-in space, programs and events. Most services and programs are offered with no or minimal cost.
- Caulfield Community Health Service is working with Holmesglen TAFE to support healthy eating for international students (this also provides an opportunity to support social inclusion).
- There are also several social groups or drop-in centres run by local community and church organisations, which welcome international students.

ISEPICH can support information sharing and further development of services and programs through its regular communication sharing and website (www.isepich.org).

Introduction

International education has grown significantly in Australia over the last 10 years and in 2008, nearly half a million students came to Australia (Gillard 2009). However, there is an increasing awareness and understanding that the experience of International students is not always a positive and enriching one. Ang & Liamputtong (2008) found that International Students experience difficulties in adjusting when they come to Australia. These include the difficulties associated with adapting to a new culture and a different language, but also relate to some of the basic necessities of life such as housing, employment and social connections (Ang & Liamputtong 2008; Thomson, Rosenthal & Russell 2005).

International Students have also been victims of violence and discrimination. Violence against students has been a particular concern and there has been considerable debate about whether it is motivated by racism or whether it results from the fact that international students are often vulnerable to opportunistic theft and assault. Research by Babacan et al (2010) suggests it arises from a mixture of both causes and they cannot easily be separated.

Factors such as housing, income and employment, social connection and exposure to violence or discrimination, commonly referred to as the social determinants of health, play a significant role in determining whether individuals will experience poor or good health (AMA 2007; VicHealth 2009). In addition, international students experience “cultural stress” (Thompson, Rosenthal and Russell 2005), which also affects their health and wellbeing.

The aim of this project was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of International students living and studying within the inner south east. This is part of a larger project that the Inner South East Partnership in Community and Health (ISEPICH) is conducting on health inequalities in the inner south east. We begin by discussing what was already known about the experiences of International Students when this project commenced.

Background/Literature review

International students at University/TAFE experience greater changes ‘during the initial transitional period than domestic students’ in Australia (Ang & Liamputtong 2008, p. 109). Similarly to new migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, they have to deal with the complexities of travelling to another country, as well as dealing with a culture that often has different values, norms and customs compared with their home country (Ang & Liamputtong 2008). Therefore, it is not surprising that ‘the physical and psychological well-being of students can be affected by these adjustment challenges’ (Thompson, Rosenthal and Russell 2005, p. 3).

Thompson, Rosenthal and Russell (2005) suggest that many International students experience cultural stress when studying in Australia. They classify cultural stress as ‘a dimension of well-being that is fundamental to the

experience of relating to others in society and is likely to be associated with students' well-being in a number of domains' (Thompson, Rosenthal and Russell 2005, p. 3).

International students experience cultural stress in a number of ways but the following things have been particularly found to contribute: isolation; difficulty in communicating and speaking English; feeling lonely and homesick; difficulties with finding affordable and appropriate housing; unemployment and limited income; trouble accessing culturally appropriate and healthy affordable food and faith communities; pressure from parents and family back home to perform well; concerns about academic performance; and discrimination (Ang & Liamputtong 2008; Rosenthal, Russell & Thompson 2006; City of Darebin 2009; Wilde 2009). International students who experience high rates of cultural stress are more likely to experience poor health, especially mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety and stress.

International education continues to make a significant contribution to Australia's economy (Gillard 2009). In 2008, nearly half a million students came to Australia, contributing \$15.5 billion, and becoming 'our third largest source of overseas earnings' (Gillard 2009, p. 1). However, international education in recent times has received considerable media coverage, which has not been about this positive contribution or the benefits for international students studying and living in Australia. Rather, it has been about appalling treatment of international students, such as violence and discrimination experienced by international students, dodgy education operators and international students living in inadequate and overcrowded housing.

Extensive media coverage and public concern about the poor treatment of international students led the Federal Government to launch a Senate inquiry into the Welfare of International Students on the 17th June 2009. The findings of this enquiry have become available since our project was completed (Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee 2009) and call for a number of changes to improve the education and personal wellbeing and safety of International Students. A recent review (Baird 2010), of the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act*, again completed after our project, has also called for improvements. The recommendations of these inquiries and other studies are discussed in the Recommendations section of this report.

The health and wellbeing of international students is of concern and interest to ISEPICH. There are three major public educational institutions in the ISEPICH catchment area, Swinburne University and TAFE college campus in Prahran, Monash University campus in Caulfield and Holmesglen TAFE college in Chadstone. Data collected by ISEPICH also suggests that increasing numbers of international students are residing in the inner south east (ISEPICH 2009). Between 2001 and 2006, there was an increase of 1,225 persons born in India and 1,183 persons born in China living in the City of Glen Eira alone (ISEPICH 2009). This increase is of relevance because Indian and Chinese students make up the highest proportion of international students studying in Victoria (DSE 2004).

Method

The three major components of this study were:

- Literature review
- Consultations with key informants and stakeholders
- Two focus groups with international students

Prior to conducting the focus groups with international students, the student researcher (Felicity Smith) conducted a review of the literature around the international student experience in Australia, including research reports, government documents and media reports. The researcher and supervisor also met with a number of staff from Swinburne University, Prahran Campus, including the campus nurse, International Student Advisor and a student counsellor.

At around the same time students studying Community Development at Swinburne University Prahran campus contacted the Multicultural Liaison officer at the City of Port Phillip regarding a lunch and forum for International Students at Prahran campus. The City of Port Phillip and ISEPICH subsequently agreed to support this lunch with information and a small amount of funding. The City of Stonnington also provided information on services available to students at the lunch. Discussions with the health nurse, counsellor, international student advisor and international students assisted our understanding of the common issues experienced by international students within the ISEPICH catchment area. The student lunch also provided opportunities for us to publicise the project to recruit participants for the focus groups which were the next stage of the project.

The researcher then conducted two focus groups to collect information from international students. A focus group is a qualitative research method, where usually 5 to 10 people are informally interviewed 'in a group discussion setting' (Neuman 2003). Focus groups are a popular method of qualitative research, as they allow researchers to listen and gain information from a group of participants who are similar to each other, in an environment that is comfortable and non threatening (Krueger & Casey 2009). Focus groups allow researchers to gain a better understanding of 'how people feel or think about an issue, product or service' (Krueger & Casey 2009, p. 2). This was suitable method for this project, as it allowed us to gain a better understanding and insight into the experiences of international students.

Both focus groups were conducted at the St Kilda Town Hall in the City of Port Phillip. Both groups were recorded on a Dictaphone and notes were also taken by the researcher and a colleague. The researcher also asked participants to write brief responses to questions at the end of the focus group. Participants were informed that their identity would remain confidential and that their names would not be used in a report and their informed consent was sought before beginning the focus groups. Appendix 1 includes the questions that were asked in the focus groups, and the plain language explanatory statement and consent form provided to students participating in the focus groups (the researcher also gave a verbal summary of the explanatory statement at the beginning of the focus group).

The data collected from the focus groups were then broken down into themes, utilising both the notes and the audio file. These themes were identified by frequency and extensiveness of responses that students gave to questions, and discussions that followed from these questions. The researcher also analysed the responses the participants gave on paper to the final question, via a word search. Words that appeared more than four times were considered important and constituted a key theme. Access to and the experience of accessing health services was a theme that was identified prior to the research as important for this project.

There were a number of limitations in the research. Due to limitations of time and resources the researcher was only able to interview a total of eleven participants. In addition, of these participants only two were male, which was an unforeseen limitation. If we had had more time and resources for the project we may have been able to conduct more focus groups with more male participants. Also, the researcher was restricted for time in both focus groups, and unable to get through all the planned questions.

Eleven international students participated in the focus groups. Five participants were in the first focus group and six in the second. These students were recruited through Swinburne University, Prahran Campus, as described, however three students who participated were not from Swinburne University, Prahran campus. Nine of the eleven participants either lived or went to University/TAFE in the inner south east region. They ranged in age from 19 to 38 years. However, one participant did not disclose their age. Nine out of the eleven participants were female. Four participants were from China, two from India, two from Malaysia, one from Japan, one from South Africa and one from Mongolia. Two participants were completing a University based course, one a Masters degree and one an undergraduate degree. The other nine were completing a Diploma at a TAFE institution. One of the participants had also completed secondary school in Melbourne. The eleven participants had been living in Australia between three months and three years.

Information and analysis of the major themes that emerged from the focus groups are provided in the Results and Discussion section following.

Results and Discussion

Major themes that emerged from the focus groups are discussed below, with illustrative comments from the students.

Discrimination and Racism

Discrimination and racism was a common theme raised by participants in the focus group. They felt that they were often victims of discrimination and racism in relation to finding work and housing, costs of tuition fees and through being unable to access concession cards on public transport.

Students often felt that they were singled out or denied a service because they were an International student or because of their ethnic background.

'They don't want you because of the skin colour'

To discriminate against someone because of their ethnicity or race is a human rights violation and has a negative impact on health and wellbeing. In particular it increases the risk of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety (Vic Health 2008b).

On occasions the International students who participated in the research may have experienced indirect discrimination, where there was no intention to discriminate against them. This may have been the case for a number of students when they were trying to seek housing through a real estate agent. Because they did not meet the agent's criteria, they were denied a rental property. However, it also appeared that students had experienced direct discrimination in the workplace. Two participants reported that they were paid less in comparison to other employees doing the same role, because they were international students.

'At my restaurant there were two different wages, one for Australian, local students, local people and one for Japanese students'

Difficulties in finding affordable and appropriate housing

All participants said that they had experienced difficulties in finding affordable and appropriate housing. They felt that student housing provided and promoted through the University/TAFE was too expensive and very small. They found inner city accommodation very expensive. In particular they found housing that was close to their University/TAFE was expensive, small and overcrowded, with one student having lived in a house with nine other people.

'Inner city accommodation is very packed, I think more than ten students in the house I had to stay in'. 'Then we have to share everything, the toilet the bathroom, the kitchen and everything'

'Some of the accommodation has no living space, we have to spend meal time in our room, our study time in our room'

VicHealth has found that living in overcrowded housing can often result in 'severe health and wellbeing problems', because it places extreme demand on 'bathroom, kitchen and laundry facilities and can lead to the spread of infectious diseases' (2008a, p. 3).

Because housing was so expensive and overcrowded in the inner city, many students chose to live in the outer suburbs.

'Narre Warren is very far away from here, but it is better for me, it is a house'.

However, it can then take some students over two hours to commute to and from University (Wilde pers. comm. 2009).

A number of students also experienced issues when trying to find rental accommodation through a real estate agent. All participants who had contact with a real estate, believed that they were discriminated against because they were an international student and not a permanent resident.

Many students had difficulty in meeting the real estate agent's requirements, such as: permanent residency, driver's licence and previous house bills. One student had lodged five applications with a real estate agent to find a house and reported that it was not until the sixth application, when they said '*I will pay half years rental in advance*' that they got the property.

'When you tell them you are international student, they do not get back to you'.

'Constantly turned down'

One participant said that it is easier to get a house through a real estate agent as an International student when your parents will cover the costs.

Difficulties associated with work and employment

All students had experienced issues around work. This included finding work, restrictions on working a maximum of 20 hours per week, discrimination and exploitation in the workplace and limited time to work due to University commitments. Four students were employed and two of these worked in hospitality. Many felt that employers preferred to employ Australians, despite what their performance might be. Some students felt restricted in their work choices because they did not fit certain job criteria as they did not have Permanent Residency (PR) or Australian Citizenship.

It has been found that having a job is better for health than not having one (WHO 2003). However, this may not always be the case for students who are studying. Having inadequate income, which maybe the case for those students who are poorly paid or exploited at work, can contribute to not having safe housing, and not buying good quality food as well as limiting their access to health care (AMA 2007). Moreover, being exploited or badly treated in the workplace has a negative effect on a person's health and wellbeing.

It has been found that 'secure and satisfactory employment offers financial independence, a sense of control, self confidence and social contact' (Stanwick 2006, quoted in Vic Health 2008, p. 1). Those who lack job security and are unemployed 'report the lowest levels of self-rated health and subjective wellbeing' (Cummins 2006, quoted in Vic Health 2008, p. 1).

Some students felt that they were exploited in the workplace and one student talked about meaning and satisfaction in work.

'We will work hard and we can be acceptable, but otherwise if we always just work in a restaurant, no one will know what ability we have and can we do better'.

'Hard to find jobs other than restaurant job, because most of the jobs, including some of the part-time jobs, require PR or citizenship'.

Two students reported that they had been exploited in their workplace. One had completed four hours of work and was only paid \$30. Another student was paid \$3 to \$4 less than Australian employees doing the same job at the same workplace. Research suggests this is a common experience for International Students as they are often unaware of their rights at work (RMIT 2009)

'Some of the ... employer[s] do not pay us for the first time, they take it as a trial'.

Two students felt that they found it hard to find work because employers do not want workers who can only work 20 hours a week and that can only work on weekends. The majority of the students could only work weekends because of University commitments during the week.

'They don't want you to apply if you're free only during the weekends. I have classes four days a week, so that's the only shift that I can apply for'

Homesickness, isolation and difficulties in adapting

A number of students mentioned that they felt lonely and that they missed their family and friends back home. This was particularly prevalent for students in the first few months to a year of when they first arrived in Australia. At least half of the students found it difficult to adapt to a new culture and language in Australia. One participant said that they had experienced depression in Australia, however they did not elaborate on this.

Struggling to get used to new country, felt lonely and lost in the first year'.

'First year is really just about adapting'.

'International students have no places to turn to when they are facing problems, especially for those whose English is not good enough'.

'There are services for migrants & refugees but not for international students'.

'Please do provide some information about Aussie/VIC/Melbourne policies or laws in different language through internet or provide some booklet in schools, universities'.

Education providers can play a key role in promoting social inclusion and creating support networks for International Students (RMIT 2009). All of the students who were studying at Swinburne Prahran campus, were very satisfied with the support that the University gave in helping them adapt to their new life in Australia.

'Uni services helped me adapt to this country'.

Lifestyle and safety

At least half of the participants felt that Australia was a friendly place and that Melbourne was a good environment to live and study in. Three participants from China felt that they had more freedom and more time to do things outside of study in Australia, in comparison to their home country.

One student felt that if you were able to work and get a steady income that you were more likely to have a good lifestyle,

'If you get a good job, then you can expect to have a good lifestyle'.

Most of the participants felt that it was hard to interact and make friends with Australian students. They felt that many of the Australian students kept to their own groups. However, they did feel that it was easy to make friends and socialise with other international students.

Half of the participants felt that safety was an issue for International students. However, none of the participants reported that they had experienced violence or were a victim of violence.

One participant felt that it would be helpful if information was provided about Australian and Victorian policies and laws in different languages.

Health services

International students are required to have private health insurance in order to study in Australia, but this insurance does not ensure they have access to all services they may need nor does it always cover the full cost of treatment. At least half of the participants were confused about where and what hospitals and medical services they could access with their International student health insurance. They were also unsure about how much it would cost them to access health services.

'The first time I came here I didn't know, I didn't have enough information, when my son was sick I go to the community health care centre, they charged me \$90'

'We are not allowed to go to every single doctor'

'When we came from our country we were told that this is your health card, you can visit any time if you are not well from our country, and when we come here the picture is totally different, is totally different, we have to pay and go through a lot of pain'

The majority of students had experienced paying cash up front when accessing a medical service that is covered under their insurance. Medication, dental care and seeing a specialist was not covered by their insurance.

'Before you go to the doctor you make sure it falls under the list, and your dental needs are not covered'

'Doctors and nurses don't know the medical system for international students. So they refer us to any hospitals, they think those hospitals are free for international students, but actually they're not.'

One student had to pay \$70 to access a medical service that was outside the insurance agency list of medical services that they can access.

One participant said that when they felt sick, they would just stay at home and sleep and self medicate, rather than go see a doctor.

Public transport and tuition fees

All of the participants found public transport expensive and were frustrated that they did not have access to concession cards on public transport. The majority of participants also believed that tuition fees were too expensive, although they did not elaborate further on this topic.

'As a student travelling to uni 4 days a week, I am forced to buy a monthly card \$110.00 - when I don't even have a steady job!'

'Couldn't get the Concession price. My monthly ticket zone 1 and 2 costs me \$169.00'.

Permanent Residency

At least half of the participants wanted to get Permanent Residency (PR) after they had completed their course. Many of the students were frustrated with the process and the criteria for getting PR. They were also frustrated by the changes to PR, therefore making it difficult for them to apply.

There are some misconceptions in the Australian community around the issue of permanent residency, with some Australians apparently believing that international students are exploiting education as a route to permanent residency. This is a misunderstanding, as the link between certain courses and eligibility for permanent residency is related to areas of skill shortages in Australia. In other words the system is designed to benefit Australia as well as providing opportunities for permanent residency to students.

This can cause problems for students when they study for a certain qualifications but part way through their course find these are no longer given priority for permanent residency. Participants in this study who were completing a course in childcare were frustrated that the course had been taken off the Permanent Resident register after they had started the course.

'We're spending a lot of money doing a course we love, but are not eligible to apply for P.R. And this course was taken off the list after we enrolled! And now I don't want to change my course because I love it!'

In addition, students who have studied for qualifications that are useful in Australia may be disadvantaged if they cannot stay here as the qualifications may not be relevant to their country of origin.

'Even after uni, we are not guaranteed for permanent visa. Qualifications (as a community development worker) obtained in Aus are not recognised in my country.'

Students may also be subject to family pressures to gain permanent residency. One participant had two brothers that are Australian citizens. The participant said that their family was trying to get their parents to Australia, and in order to do this they needed two more people in their family to have Australian Citizenship.

Food and nutrition

'A good diet and adequate food supply are central for promoting health and well-being' (WHO 2003, p. 26). Those on low incomes are least able to purchase fresh healthy food, and are more likely to purchase cheaper processed foods (WHO 2003).

Most of the participants found that they could access the food that they would usually eat in their country of origin, either from a big chain supermarket, Chinese/specific supermarket or from a market. Some participants felt that the markets closed too early for them to purchase food.

'The trading hours, that's the problem, because we have to stay in the school, the morning to three, four o'clock. Also the travelling it takes time. When you go there it's closed'.

At least half of the participants felt that chain supermarkets are too expensive. Two participants also found it hard to purchase vegetarian food.

'Back in India there were a few days when I never used to eat meat, for religious reasons. But after coming here I feel it's just easier to eat meat everyday'.

'Its very hard for me to survive, I have to get takeaway when I have my exams and so many assignments, and my placement'

Two participants said that they receive food from the restaurant they work in. One of these participants said that they do not cook at home and always bought takeaway food, because they did not have time and did not want to cook.

All the female participants said that they cooked meals and the two male participants said that they did not cook

Services at Swinburne University

The majority of students studying at Swinburne University, Prahran campus were very happy with their course and the services provided by the University. All students who had accessed the health services, which included the campus nurse and counsellor, were very happy with the service provided. One student identified some concerns about the learning support services at Prahran campus.

As previously noted, education providers can play a key role in promoting social inclusion and creating support networks for International Students (RMIT 2009). The comments from students suggest that Swinburne University and TAFE was providing good support to students in this regard.

'Swinburne – has the best counselling system, teachers are very helpful'.

'They were the best people who helped me adjust to this country, and to adjust me to so many things, and they guided me a lot, like where to go to the market'.

Unfortunately due to the limited time available for this project and the difficulty in engaging students at private colleges, we were not able to consult with these students, even though reports suggest they often face much greater difficulties.

Conclusion

In considering the experiences of the students in the consultation, it is important to note many of the students felt positive about their experiences and they generally felt they had been well-supported by their educational institution. The emphasis on problems in this report arises because we were asking them to talk about these issues, as we were aware of the difficulties that international students were facing and looking for ways that ISEPICH members could support them and promote their health and wellbeing.

We are also aware that some of these experiences are common to all students when starting tertiary education, especially if they are distant from home, but in the case of international students these difficulties are exacerbated by cultural factors and, at times, discrimination, isolation and lack of support by government or institutions.

Overall it is clear that even where the education institution, like Swinburne, is seen as providing good services to students in regard to their personal health and wellbeing, there are many factors in the broader community and policy settings that can make their experience difficult.

ISEPICH urges member agencies and local community groups and organisations to consider the recommendations made in this report (pages 4-5) and to develop policy and take action to ensure that international students in the catchment are welcomed and supported.

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Appendix 1

1. Questions asked of participants in the focus group were as follows:

- Before you came to Australia, what were your expectations of studying and living in Australia?
- Now that you are in Australia, tell me about your experience?

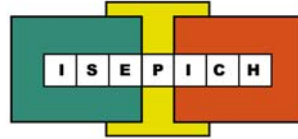
I then followed with a number of more specific questions. However, please note that not all these questions were asked, due to many of these questions being covered in a prior discussion.

- What is your experience of accessing health services in Melbourne? For example have you found accessing a doctor, counselling services or dental easy and affordable? At University or outside of University?
- What is your experience of student services at Swinburne University?
- Could you tell me about your experience of buying and preparing food? Is this different to your home country?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your experience of finding work and working? Have there been any issues around this?
- Can you tell me about your experience of finding housing? How was this experience?
- Can you tell me about your experience of meeting new people and creating support networks/friends? How has this experience been?
- How do you get to and from university and work? Can you tell me about your experience of accessing and travelling on public transport?
- What are your plans after you finish studying?
- What are the best parts of being an international student in Australia?

Finally, I asked all participants to write a response to the following question on a piece of paper.

- What are some of the problems that International Students experience?

2. Plain language statement and consent form used in consultation



Inner South East Partnership in Community and Health

www.isepich.org

Primary Care Partnerships

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/pcps/>

Hi my name is Felicity Smith and I am a third year Social Science RMIT University student, undertaking work placement at ISEPICH (Inner South East Partnership in Community Health). ISEPICH is the Primary Care Partnership (PCP) for the cities of Stonnington, Glen Eira and Port Phillip. ISEPICH is a partnership of agencies, which include 50 health and community support organisations who work together in planning and coordinating health services for the local community. As part of my role at ISEPICH, I am consulting to learn more about the experiences of International Students in the inner south east region of Melbourne. This is part of a larger project that ISEPICH is conducting to find out more about health inequalities in the inner south east.

You are invited to participate in a consultation. If you agree, I will need you to participate in a discussion group for around 1 hour. Please note that your identity will be kept confidential, you may stop at any time and you may also ask me to destroy any information I collect from you, as long as I can identify which information you have provided.

The information you provide may be used in a report produced by ISEPICH to help ensure students have access to services and programs. Your name or any details that can identify you will not be used in the report. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact my workplace supervisor Valerie Kay, ISEPICH Health Promotion Coordinator at: VKay@portphillip.vic.gov.au or 9209 6394.

Felicity Smith
Email: FSmith@portphillip.vic.gov.au

Please sign here to indicate that you have read and understood this statement, and consent to participate in the consultation.

..... Date.....