

Summary of results

In 2013, the Royal New Zealand Plunket Society (Plunket) undertook a research project on how to improve services and support Asian families in New Zealand. Plunket offers free Well Child and community support services, including parenting courses, support groups and a telephone advice line (PlunketLine) to all children and their parents in New Zealand. Through this project, we sought to find out what difficulties Asian families faced in accessing these services, what gaps existed in current services and what we could do to make them better.

One motivation for this project was that the number of people who identify with Asian ethnicities in New Zealand make up an increasing segment of the population, and is expected to grow over the coming decades. The proportion of Asian babies registered with Plunket has increased by 50% over the past five years. Despite this, relatively few Plunket nurses, health workers or volunteers are of Asian ethnicity.

We undertook seven focus group interviews with a total of 57 Asian parents, and seventeen face-to-face interviews with Plunket staff and key informants from other organisations. From these interviews, we found common themes about barriers and ways to successfully engage with Asian families.

The key barriers to engagement with Plunket services were cultural barriers, language barriers and lack of knowledge about what Plunket did and what services were available.

Ways to overcome these barriers and improve engagement included better promotion of services through various media and in different languages, active involvement of grandparents and other family members and working in partnership with clients and other agencies. More needed to be done to cater effectively for clients who were not fluent in English, through greater use of interpreters, translated information, multilingual staff and cultural liaison workers. Enhanced cultural competency with respect to Asian cultures and culturally-appropriate services were also important.

Good communication, being able to compromise, have a flexible approach and build trusting relationships were fundamental skills for engaging successfully with Asian clients. Economic barriers were likely to be more important for refugees and new migrants.

We also reviewed the New Zealand and international literature on health service engagement with migrant families, and found similar themes to the results of our interviews.

We made a range of recommendations for how Plunket could improve support for Asian families in New Zealand. These included:

- To support staff to actively assess the need for interpreters for all clients who have limited English language proficiency.
- To provide a choice of Asian nurse/community health worker to Asian clients where possible.
- To actively engage, provide support and education services for extended family members of Asian families, particularly grandparents who have a significant role in child care.
- To invest in the translation of key educational resources for Asian clients, including those explaining the purpose of Plunket and what services are available.
- To promote and explain Plunket services to Asian communities through a wider range of media, including ethnic media.
- To recruit and assist Asian volunteers to set up parenting and play groups where needed.
- To encourage and provide time for all staff working with Asian clients to complete cultural competency training.

We will continue to monitor our services for how effectively we are engaging with Asian families, with the aim of achieving the best start in life for all children in New Zealand.

Acknowledgements

This research was partially funded by KPS and overseen by the Plunket Asian Strategy Advisory Group (Helen Connors, Claire Rumble, Jess Beauchamp, Karen McGrath, Agnes Wong, Fiona Imlach Gunasekara and Shanaz Khan).

Plunket's Asian Strategy Advisory Group would like to thank all the Plunket staff in the wider Auckland region who helped get this project off the ground and all participants of interviews and focus groups, for their time and willingness to share their views and ideas.