

21 NOV 2025

**ADVANCING EQUITY:
SOCIAL DETERMINANTS IN
MIGRANT AND REFUGEE
HEALTH RESEARCH
SYMPOSIUM**

OVERVIEW



Snapshot

The AUT Migrant and Refugee Health Research Centre (MRHRC) and the New Zealand Policy Research Institute (NZPRI) co-hosted the symposium *Advancing Equity in Migrant and Refugee Health through the Lens of Social Determinants*. Held on 21 November 2025, the event brought together around 250 researchers, community leaders, practitioners, and policymakers to share innovative work, strengthen partnerships, and explore pathways to improve health outcomes and equity for communities with migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally. The symposium is an example of an area of public policy that benefits enormously from multi-disciplinary perspectives. Through engaging plenaries and panel discussions, insightful research and community presentations, and networking opportunities, it offered an opportunity to build connections and engage in conversations.



14

universities &
educational
institutions

18

non-profit
organisations

2

government
agencies

250

researchers,
community
leaders &
policy makers



ATTENDEES



The symposium was exceptionally rich and diverse, bringing together participants from a range of disciplines and organisations, and showcasing varied perspectives and experiences. Concurrent sessions featured presentations on completed and ongoing research projects, literature reviews, programme evaluations, and community initiatives. A wide array of methodologies was employed, including qualitative design, cross-sectional survey, mixed-methods, comparative content analysis, narrative review, participatory video, immersive workshops, multi-stage community-led approaches, collaborative word-building, Ubuntu philosophy and arts-based qualitative methods, among others. Case studies explored multiple dimensions of health and well-being across Afghan, Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Fijian Indian, Indian, Muslim, Nepalese, Rohingya, and broader Asian and MELAA communities.

The symposium began with a karakia, mihi whakatau and waiata led by Francis Leaf and Brad Cherrington. The guests were then warmly welcomed by AUT Vice Chancellor Professor Damon Salesa. In his opening address, the Vice Chancellor highlighted that the symposium as an arena for affirming the importance of diversity – not only within the work of the university but also in shaping an inclusive society where different voices are valued and empowered to contribute meaningfully. This was followed by the greetings of Associate Professor Nadia Charania, Prof. Eleanor Holroyd and Dr. Lisa Meehan, representing MRHRC and NZPRI as symposium co-hosts.



RECAP

Morning Plenary session

After the opening ceremony, **Dr. Lincoln Dam** from the School of Education introduced the morning plenary session that featured three keynote presentations.

The first keynote speaker was **Daniel Gamboa**, CEO of the New Zealand National Refugee Youth Council, who talked about refugee youth involvement in various health-related initiatives across the country. His presentation highlighted the need to foster inclusive environments that support and nurture refugee youth potential to address barriers to promoting wellbeing



The second keynote speakers were **Andrew Lockhart** and **Blessing Kanengoni-Nyatara**, National Manager and Senior Advisor of Refugee Health and Migrant Support at the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), respectively. Their presentation focused on Aotearoa's refreshed Refugee Settlement Strategy, with a particular emphasis on advancing health outcomes for refugee communities. Following this was the last keynote delivered by **Dr. William Stauffer** of the Department of Medicine and Pediatrics Infectious Diseases, University of Minnesota. Dr. Stauffer shared the work of the Migrant Health Initiative that has been supporting migrant and refugee background communities during and post-COVID through health education, workforce development, training and technical assistance, among others.



The plenary concluded with a thought-provoking panel discussion, examining from youth, government, global health and community perspectives how post-pandemic trends are shaping and impacting health equity and outcomes for migrant and refugee background communities in Aotearoa and globally.

The symposium continued with parallel presentations showcasing almost 50 abstracts. During the breaks, attendees had the opportunity to learn more about a range of community initiatives showcased at exhibition stalls. A video screening of Multilingual Community Communication during the COVID-19 pandemic – a collaborative research project involving researchers from the University of Canterbury, Lincoln University and University of Auckland was also made available for participants to view.



Afternoon Plenary session

The symposium concluded with an afternoon plenary that addressed the theme, Transforming the landscape: *What's next for migrant and refugee health and wellbeing?*



Panellists included esteemed leaders in the migrant and refugee health space, namely,

- **Janet Chen** (Principal Service Development Manager of the Refugee and Migrant Health at Te Whatu Ora);
- **Nivedita Sharma Vij** (Chairperson of the Asian Caucus and Co-Chair of the Policy Subcommittee at the Public Health Association of New Zealand);
- **Sara Ahmad** (New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel [NZRAP] Panel Member and National People Officer at UN Youth New Zealand); and
- **Kelly Feng** (CEO of the Asian Family Services).

Moderated by **Dr. Reem Abass**, Research Associate of MRHRC, the panel fostered a dynamic exchange, generating rich insights into the persistent challenges and emerging opportunities for shaping a more equitable and inclusive health system.

The symposium drew to a close with words of gratitude for all participants, speakers, organisers and sponsors from Ayan Said and Dr. Reem Abbas, co-leads of the organising committee. They ended with a hopeful note, encouraging everyone to carry forward the collective mahi while strengthening partnerships, deepening dialogue and continuing the shared commitment to improving migrant and refugee health.





The symposium addressed two overarching questions:

1. **What** equity means in a post-COVID environment
2. **How** social determinants are shaping health outcomes among communities with migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds in Aotearoa and elsewhere

Research themes constituting the symposium's concurrent sessions:

- Healthcare Access and Equity
- Family and Gender-based Issues
- Bridging Gaps: Language, Culture and Technology
- Towards Inclusive Processes and Places
- Healthy Ageing and Wellbeing
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Equity and Inclusion
- Environmental Risks and Disasters Response
- Community Leadership and Collective Action
- Identity, Intersectionality and Decolonial Approaches

RESEARCH THEMES

Drawing on the symposium presentations, reflections and discussions, recommended future actions revolved around the need to prioritise inclusive, responsible and equitable policy and service design. Moreover, presentations highlighted the importance of addressing the social determinants of health, recognising that these factors are interconnected and are the underlying drivers that shape health outcomes and contribute to ongoing health inequities. Advocating for culturally responsive, intersectional and equity-oriented approaches, presentations highlighted the importance of culturally tailored services to better reflect the diverse needs, strengths and lived realities of communities with migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking backgrounds. Participants also underscored the need to strengthen co-design efforts to ensure that programmes and initiatives are developed in partnership with communities they serve. Research-wise, participatory methodologies and longitudinal studies were recommended to inform sustainable, system-level change.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Other key recommendations include

- Integration of migrant-health models into formal health care systems for long-term sustainability.
- Continued investment in interpreting and translation services.
- Healthcare provider education and Te Tiriti-based models to address rare disorders equity.
- Community-led research and initiatives that promote social inclusion, cultural continuity and collective wellbeing.
- Culturally responsive ageing care frameworks; digital tools; mentorship and leadership programmes; housing solutions; disaster training and support systems; and mental health support that respond to resettlement needs.
- Crisis communication frameworks that value interactive and bi-directional engagement that enhance wellbeing, justice, trust and collective resilience.
- Inclusive work practices that create psychologically safe spaces for diverse identities.
- Youth-centred, reflexive research approaches to inform culturally responsive health policies and interventions.
- Strengthening legal protections for migrant healthcare access, expanding cross-border health financing models, and fostering community-driven advocacy for equitable policies.

Overall, recommendations foreground the centring of community voices and building alliances across sectors to advance migrant and refugee health and wellbeing – laying the groundwork for a robust future research agenda in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond.



APPENDIX

Institutions represented

Non-Profit Organisations

- Asian Family Services
- Asian Health Services
- Belong Aotearoa
- Kāhui Tū Kaha
- Khawat
- Muskaan Care Trust NZ
- New Settlers and Family Community Trust
- New Zealand Ethnic Women Trust
- New Zealand Refugee Advisory Panel
- Rare Disorders NZ
- Refugees as Survivors NZ
- Royal Life Saving Society – Australia
- SEVA Charitable Trust
- Sustainable Systems
- Thalassaemia and Sickle Cell Aotearoa New Zealand
- The Asian Network Incorporated
- Wellbeing Trust

Ethnic Associations and Society

- Nepal New Zealand Friendship Society of Canterbury
- Rohingya Association New Zealand

Government Agencies

- Ministry of Education
- Te Whatu Ora

New Zealand Universities and Educational Institutions

- Auckland University of Technology
- ICL Graduate Business School
- Eastern Institute of Technology
- Massey University
- University of Auckland
- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago
- Victoria University of Wellington

Universities Abroad

- Air University
- Australian Catholic University
- Inha University
- James Cook University
- La Trobe University
- Makarere University

Exhibition stalls

- Belong Aotearoa
- Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies, University of Auckland
- Community Research
- Migrant and Refugee Health Research Centre
- Muskaan Care Trust
- New Settlers Family and Community Trust
- Oral Health Team, Auckland University of Technology
- Public Health Association of New Zealand
- Te Whatu Ora Health New Zealand
- The Asian Network Incorporated

