



Advancing the health and safety of international students

Presented by Dr Giang Tran
Research, Advocacy and Policy Officer
Email: giang@mcwh.com.au



Acknowledgment of Country



About the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

- Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (MCWH) is a national, community-based organisation run by and for migrant and refugee women, non-binary and gender diverse people.
- Established in 1978.
- Our mission is to advance the health equity of migrant and refugee women, non-binary and gender diverse people through advocacy, social action, bilingual health education, research, training and capacity-building.



MCWH's approach to understanding health and safety

- MCWH applies an intersectional approach to analyse the dynamics of power and social inequality in our society.
- Migrant and refugee women's health and safety are influenced by intersecting social, political and economic factors.
- Centre migrant and refugee women's experiences as evidence for understanding how systems produce and/or reinforce inequities.

What this presentation covers

- International students in Australia: an overview
- International students' health and safety: what does data tell us?
- What are the barriers to accessing support services?
- How can we advance health and safety of international students?



International students in Australia: an overview

- In May 2024, there were over 810,000 international student enrolments for higher education, VET, ELICOS and schools.
- The students come from diverse cultural backgrounds and are predominantly from non-main English-speaking countries.
- International students are increasingly women. Between 2016 and 2020 the international student women rose by 22%.

(Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2024; Lehmann, A., 2022; MCWH, 2023)

An overview continued

- Experiences of social isolation due to relocating to a new country.
- Experiences of financial pressures.
- Can face difficulties obtaining housing and employment.
- International students who are women can be more at risk of experiencing gendered violence.

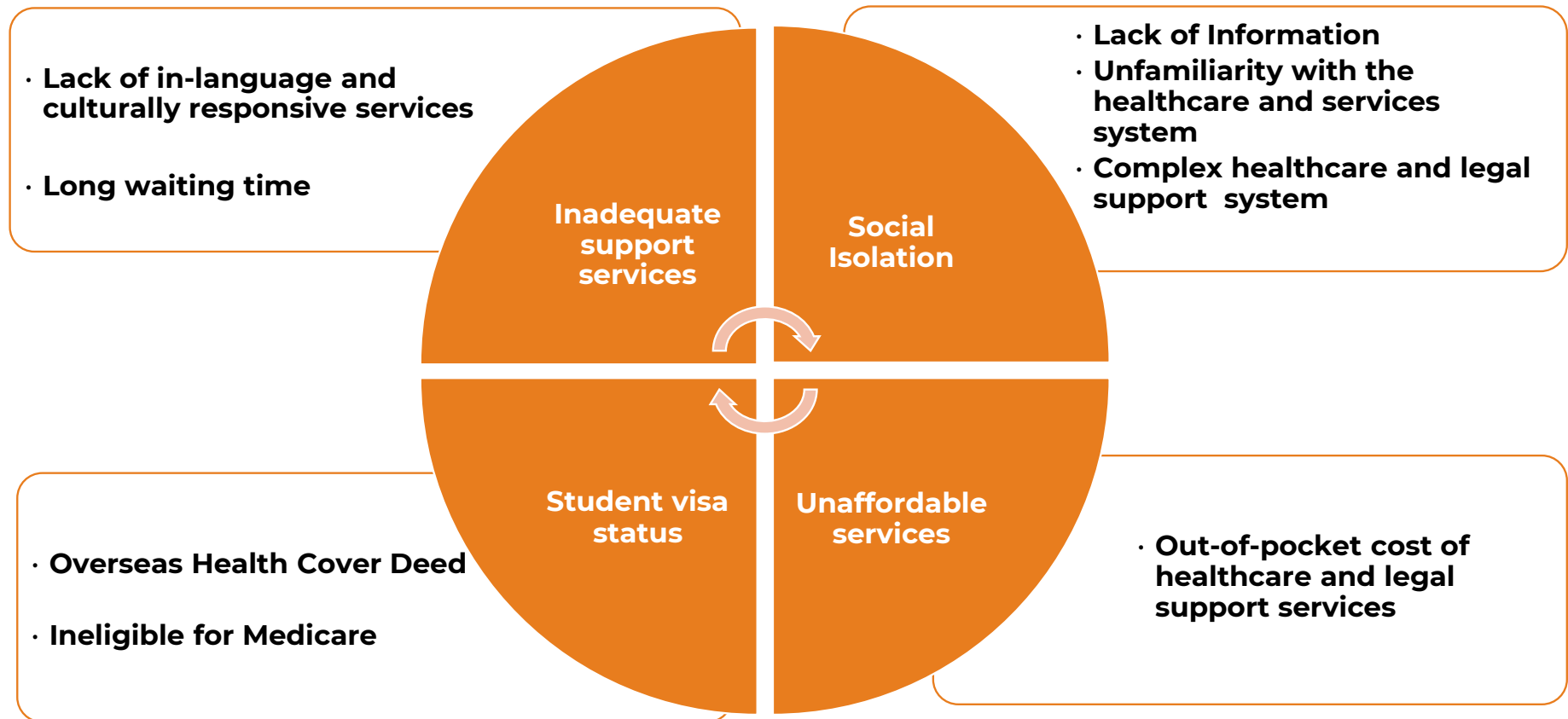
(Forbes-Mewett, H., & Nyland, C., 2008; Poljski et al., 2014; Backman et al., 2023; Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016)

International students' health and safety: what does data tell us?

- **Sexual and reproductive health issues**
 - Diverse understanding of sexual and reproductive health.
 - High rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancy.
- **Sexual and intimate partner violence**
 - High rates of SV/IPV.
 - Low rates of seeking help due to a range of barriers to accessing support services.

(MCWH, 2021; ; Poljski et al., 2014; Sanci et al., 2022; Zark et al., 2022)

Intersecting barriers to accessing support services



(MCWH, 2021; Poljski et al., 2014; Gan & Forbes-Mewett, 2019; Forbes-Mewett & McCulloch, 2016, Tran et al., 2024)

"I'm here alone, by myself, I honestly don't know who I can talk [about] this [IPV] to. It's very difficult ... I don't know who to seek help from. I can only search online, what can I do? ... I don't know where to ask. I don't know what the resources are, which platform can be used to seek help. So, that's something being missing. [when] I do have issues, there's no one telling me, okay, you can talk to this, you can talk to your doctor"

"I have overseas health insurance I pay \$150 a month for, but still, you have to pay \$200 [for mental healthcare]. I've just seen so many of my friends they just like 'I can't afford it, I'm not going to go'. So, they're just suffering because it's too expensive or because the waiting list is up to a year"

(Tran et al., 2024)

How can we advance the health and safety of international students?

- **Apply an intersectional lens to policy and practice**
- **Policy**
 - Policy action to eliminate existing systemic barriers to access healthcare:
 - ❖ Implement Recommendation 30 (4.111) of the Senate Inquiry into Universal Access to Reproductive Healthcare. *'The committee recommends that the Australian government, in consultation with state and territory governments, consider options for ensuring the provision of reproductive health to all people living in Australia, irrespective of their visa status.'*
 - Abolish waiting periods and visa restrictions for all migrants, including the Overseas Student Health Cover (OSHC) Deed.

▪ **Practice**

- Healthcare and support services both within educational institutions and the broader community need to provide international students with:
 - ❖ Information on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
 - ❖ Clear guidance about the availability of support services and how to seek support for health and safety.
- Example of Bilingual health education programs at MCWH.

■ **Practice**

- Culturally responsive support services:
 - ❖ Provide capacity building and professional development for health professionals in gendered, cross-cultural awareness.
 - ❖ Employ bilingual and bicultural staff.
 - ❖ Collaborate with migrant/ multicultural women's organisations to develop best practice guidelines for culturally responsive service delivery.

(Hach, 2012 ; MCWH, 2021)

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Thank you!

Multicultural Centre for Women's Health
Suite 207, Level 2, Carringbush Building,
134 Cambridge Street, Collingwood, VIC 3066

+61 3 9418 0999

info@mcwh.com.au

mcwh.com.au

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