

The social and wellbeing values of shared meals provided at Cultural and Linguistically Diverse organisations

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1 Executive summary

Background/purpose of study

Social interactions are important for fostering social capital and are particularly meaningful for those belonging to vulnerable population groups. Elderly immigrants are at high risk of experiencing social isolation and its associated negative health consequences. Recognising the importance of building social ties, supporting the elderly and the benefits of sharing meals, many multicultural organisations in South Australia provide shared lunches to elderly immigrants. Currently there is no evidence of the social and health value of the shared meals at ethnically focussed gatherings. Thus, this research set out to answer the following question: To what extent do shared meals have a social and health benefit for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) group recipients?

Summary of methods

Four focus groups were conducted with shared lunch attendees between August 2018 and April 2019, each with a different cultural group; Greek, Italian, Ukrainian and Chinese. The Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia (MCCSA) contacted community organisations to gain interest, and their details were passed on to the research team. Two researchers attended a meeting and observation of one shared lunch at each of the four cultural organisations. A time and place for the focus group was arranged, and organisation staff assisted with recruiting 4-5 shared lunch attendees to participate in the focus group.

All but one of the focus groups were conducted in a private room where the lunches are held, prior to one of the lunches taking place. An independent, accredited interpreter was arranged through Translation Consultants International (TCI), and they interpreted the conversation between participants and researchers. The focus groups lasted between 45-60 minutes, were audio recorded (with permission) and transcribed into written text. The interview transcripts were qualitatively analysed with the assistance of QSR International's NVivo version 12.

Key findings

There were 19 participants across the four focus groups. All had lived in Australia for over 20 years, however all still identified with the nationality of the country they migrated from. There was an even split of male and female participants, and the majority were over 80 years old. Participants were either widowed or married, and of those that were widowed, a few lived with their adult children, but majority lived alone. There were varying levels of English proficiency among participants.

The key findings of this research are:

- Long term and frequent attendance at shared lunches
- Appreciation and gratitude for services and volunteer input
- Attendance at lunches is important, prioritised and something to look forward to
- The lunches provide company, an opportunity to leave the house, a nourishing meal and entertainment
- Cultural identity is maintained through cultural focus and interaction at the lunches
- The lunches facilitate communication and social interaction, helping to prevent and/or minimise loneliness and isolation

Discussion of key findings

The overwhelmingly positive experiences associated with coming to the shared lunches is testament to how beneficial they are to those who attend. The participants demonstrated clear positive benefits to themselves, and in some cases their family members, from coming to the shared lunches. The lunches were also important for connecting with their cultural background and identity through the foods served and the communication in their native language.

The food provided through the lunches was described as culturally appropriate, tasty and healthy. For participants who lived alone, the food provided a nutritious meal that they may otherwise not have had. However, the food was not a driving motivator for why participants attended the lunches. Participants sought the social interaction and communication that the shared meal provided. This social interaction was not just helpful for fostering social ties within the context of the lunches themselves, but also extended to other areas of life outside of the lunches.

Through the social connection and building of social ties, it is evident that shared lunches play a role in fostering social capital in CALD groups. The lunches provided an opportunity to connect with other individuals, to build trust and friendship. Participants were able to form a community of like-minded individuals, from similar cultural backgrounds, with similar life experiences, that could support one another both within and outside the shared lunch gatherings.

Conclusion

The shared lunch gatherings offered at cultural organisations are highly valued and important to elderly CALD individuals in the community. The social connection and communication, the opportunity to leave the house and the cultural experience of attending all contributed to an improved sense of health and wellbeing for participants.

Recommendations

Suggested implications for policy and practice

- a) The shared lunches provided by cultural organisations in the community are highly valued by those who attend and add much to the wellbeing of participants. Continued support both financially and in external service provision is recommended.
- b) To extend participation, the promotion of CALD shared lunches at medical (general) practices, libraries, councils and centres of religious worship is recommended.

Suggested areas for future investigation/research relating to CALD shared lunches

- a) The age of the shared lunch attendees (average age ~80 years) suggests that issues of succession planning and sustainability should be explored;
- b) Identification and connection with those who would benefit from these cultural shared lunches but as yet are not attending should be explored;
- c) The barriers and facilitators to attending the lunches, including financial and transport issues, and how this may impact attendance at the shared lunches should be explored;
- d) Improved social connection provided through these shared lunches is important to this demographic and age group. To fully determine the social return on investment (SROI) and the benefits to individuals and the CALD community overall, it is recommended that SROI analysis be conducted to assist in future funding and service provision models.

2 Introduction

Conceptually, 'social capital' is well established. However it is only recently that we have begun to characterise it and explore it through research¹. Social capital is the idea that networks with shared norms, values and understandings foster cooperation and unity within, and among, groups¹. We now realise the many and varied settings to which social capital contributes to the quality of life for individuals and communities^{1, 2}. These types of social relationships are important for building trust, reciprocity and positive supports of human capacity. Social capital is positively associated with both health and wellbeing outcomes. While health is most commonly defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing³, the term 'wellbeing' is not as easily defined. At a minimum, wellbeing includes satisfaction with life, fulfillment, positive function, the presence of positive emotions and the absence of negative emotions⁴. It has been demonstrated that people with more social links tend to report improved wellbeing, higher levels of life satisfaction, greater levels of happiness, improved physical and psychological health, and higher life expectancy^{2, 5, 6}. Conversely, individuals who do not have strong social ties, or those experiencing social isolation, are more likely to suffer from depression and illness^{2, 5}.

Social interactions foster social capital⁵ and are particularly meaningful for those belonging to vulnerable population groups². While having a broad function for increasing social cohesion, social capital is especially important for those groups who are cut off from social networks at home, and may not feel part of the mainstream social, community and language groups in which they live². Those who have migrated to a new country are at risk of social isolation, as they may not have many, if any, social links. They do not speak the same language, they may not share the same cultural or religious values and they may not eat the same foods as their new countrymen⁷.

As of 2017, there are an estimated 258 million people living in a country other than their country of birth⁸, an increase of 49% since the year 2000⁸. Immigrant groups rely on social capital for guidance, identity and support in a new country⁵. A Canadian study reported that socialising with people from a similar culture and language group to their own was helpful for immigrants in establishing their sense of belonging in a new environment⁹. With increasing rates of migration across the globe, it is important that immigrants can form social ties and foster social capital for them to thrive in their new country.

Elderly individuals are also at greater risk of experiencing social isolation¹⁰. As individuals age, they experience shifts and changes in their life, family and surroundings. They may lose loved ones, partners and friends. Their health may decline, or they may be afflicted by an

injury rendering them unable to do things they could previously¹⁰. Leaving the house may become challenging, neighbours and friends may no longer be around, children and other family members may not live close by and interaction with others may be limited. Any of these elements can lead to an individual feeling socially isolated, which can have a negative impact on their health and wellbeing¹⁰. To further compound the risk of social isolation, elderly immigrants may find it challenging to communicate with people outside their native language¹¹. Being unable to communicate with others can be socially isolating in itself, and when paired with the risk of loneliness in older age, elderly immigrants are undoubtedly at great risk of experiencing social isolation and its associated negative health consequences¹¹.

Australia is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world, with 31% of the population born overseas and around two-thirds born in a non-English speaking country¹². Individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds make up a significant proportion of the Australian population aged over 65 years¹². Supportive social capital can be fostered through regular gatherings of cultural groups and the diversity in the Australian population has led to the formation of many ethnic-focussed support groups. The information, services, support and social ties provided by ethnic-focussed organisations play an important role in bringing people together from similar cultural backgrounds.

Recognising the importance of building social ties, supporting the elderly and the benefits of sharing meals, many multicultural organisations in South Australia provide a shared lunch with culturally appropriate food to elderly CALD people. The lunches potentially provide the only opportunity for some people to get out of the house, eat a nourishing meal and connect with those of the same cultural background. The symbolism of 'sharing the table' – known as 'commensality' – with cultural brothers and sisters is likely to be, in and of itself, a bonding experience¹³. There is also a strong argument that the nature and variety of shared food can foster health and wellbeing, as 'social eating' itself has been associated with positive health outcomes¹⁴.

Currently there is no evidence of the social and health value of the shared meals at ethnically focussed gatherings. Thus, the gap in knowledge raises the question: To what extent do shared meals have a social and health benefit for CALD group recipients? This research set out to answer this question.

3 Project Aims

This research aimed firstly to explore the experiences and perceptions of those who attend shared lunches, and secondly to appraise the extent to which the lunches play a role in the health and wellbeing of recipients who may experience cultural displacement and be at

greater risk of experiencing social isolation.

The research had the following objectives:

1. To explore the experiences of participants of shared meal programs that are offered through the regular meetings of cultural and linguistically diverse groups
2. To appraise the extent to which shared meals play a role in the health and wellbeing of recipients

4 Methods

Qualitative research methods were employed in order to meet our research objectives. Qualitative methods allow a more in-depth exploration into the perspectives of those experiencing a phenomenon of interest¹⁵. Focus groups were chosen as they allow for exploratory conversation between participants and can often provide a deeper understanding of participant perspectives¹⁵. This project was approved by Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, project number 8001.

4.1 Participants and recruitment

From the project outset we aimed to conduct four focus groups, each with a different cultural group. With the assistance of the Multicultural Communities Council of South Australia (MCCSA) we were put in touch with the heads of several organisations. Following this, two members of the research team attended a meeting and an observation of one shared lunch at each of the four cultural organisations who took part in the project. At each meeting, the researchers spoke with organisation heads, staff and lunch attendees, provided information sheets and consent forms for the study (Appendices 1, 2 and 3), and in some cases joined in the lunch.

Recruitment of participants occurred with significant assistance from the organisation staff. This was due to our inability to communicate with attendees who did not speak English, and the staff's familiarity with the attendees. We provided the organisation staff with the following eligibility criteria for focus group participants:

- Gender balance (equal numbers of males and females where possible)
- Lunch attendance >6 months
- Lunch attendance at least once per fortnight
- Some who lived alone, and some who lived with others
- Varying levels of English proficiency

Those who had a recognised cognitive disability were asked to be excluded from recruitment. Also excluded were those with excellent English-speaking skills, on the basis that they are likely to experience different outcomes than those who do not speak English confidently. Organisation staff recruited 4-5 participants to be involved in each focus group. A date and time for the focus groups was arranged that best suited the organisation and participants. In all cases but one, this was in a private room where the lunches are held, prior to one of the lunches taking place. An independent interpreter accredited by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) was arranged by the research team through Translation Consultants International (TCI).

4.2 Conducting the focus groups

At the focus groups, two members of the research team were present; one facilitating the focus group, the other notetaking throughout the discussion. Participants were provided with the information sheet and consent form, and these were read out by the interpreter in the participant's native language prior to commencement of the focus group. The focus groups lasted between 45-60 minutes and a flexible interview schedule was used to guide the conversation (Appendix 4). The questions focused on participants' experience of the shared lunches, the importance of the lunches, perceived benefits of attending and potential improvements to the program.

During the focus group the facilitator asked the questions in English, and they were interpreted into participant's native language by the interpreter. Participants would respond in their preferred language (English or native) and their responses were interpreted back to English where required. At the end of the focus group, participants were given a \$20 supermarket voucher as recognition of their involvement in the study.

Following consent from participants, the focus group discussions were audio transcribed into written text. The interview transcripts were qualitatively analysed with the assistance of QSR International's NVivo version 12 qualitative data analysis software¹⁶. Initial coding was undertaken where 'codes' were assigned to data that were reflective and representative of the meaning of participant responses¹⁷. Codes were created inductively from the data and were modified and altered as analysis developed. Once codes had been created, they were collapsed into categories that were representative of the main themes found through the coding process¹⁷. Categories were revisited through discussions with the research team, resulting in the final categories that represent the key findings of the work, presented below. All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

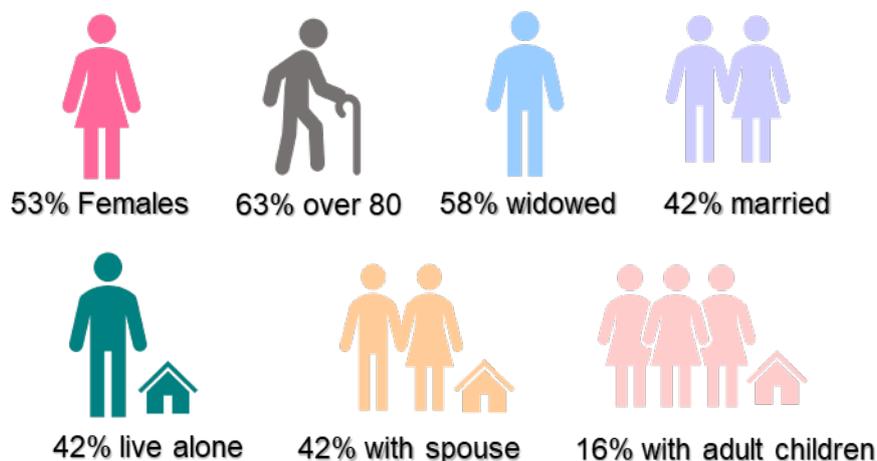
5 Results

5.1 Participants

Four focus groups were conducted between August 2018 and April 2019, each with a different cultural group; Greek, Italian, Ukrainian and Chinese. The groups varied in size from 4-5 participants per focus group.

Across the four focus groups, there were 19 participants. All participants had lived in Australia for over 20 years, however all still identified with the nationality of the country they migrated from. There was a relatively even split of male and female participants and the majority of participants were over 80 years old. All participants were 70 years of age or older. Participants were either widowed or married, and of those that were widowed, a few lived with their adult children, but the majority lived alone.

There were varying levels of English proficiency among the participants, with some able to confidently hold a conversation in English, and some confident speaking only a few words. This resulted in the focus groups being conducted in a mixture of English and participant native language.



5.2 Focus group findings

The findings of the focus group discussions are reported below. There were seven main categories that emerged from the analysis, and these will be reported as follows;

- Attending the shared lunches
- Services involved in the shared lunches
- Experience of attending the shared lunches
- Food served at the lunches
- Importance of attending the shared lunches

- Impacting life outside of the shared lunches
- Life difficulties

5.2.1 Attending the shared lunches

5.2.1.1 Joining and length of time attending the shared lunches

Although one of the eligibility requirements for this study was that participants had attended shared lunches for at least 6 months, the majority had been attending the clubs for over 12 months, with some being involved for more than 20 years. Several participants joined their respective organisations when they first arrived in Australia, whereas others joined more recently due to changes at home such as the loss of a spouse or newfound time for socialising.

I've been in Adelaide for the last 22 years. As soon as I arrived here, I joined the Chinese Association. – Alice¹, Chinese female (married)

I'm here for the seven months since my wife died. Before she was the cook and she was help with me and now nobody home, I'm by myself and I join three different older citizen clubs this year. – Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

Participants learned about the availability of shared lunches from a variety of sources, and reasons for joining were varied. Some participants were made aware of the services upon arrival in Australia, some by friends or family, and others by their local council.

My...local council said 'do you want an Italian club to join – to have lunch with them' I said 'yes' – Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

Well, a friend of my friend, she's here about maybe since the start and then my friend start to come and she used to say 'you don't go out nowhere' you know 'come along' – Giulia, Italian female (widowed)

5.2.1.2 Frequency of attending the lunches

To be eligible for inclusion in the focus groups, participants had to attend the shared lunches at least once per fortnight. All participants attended the lunches often, with some attending as often as they were held. The organisations differed in their frequency of gatherings as follows; once per week (Ukrainian), multiple times per week (Italian), or multiple times per week at different locations (Chinese, Greek).

¹ Respondents names have been changed for anonymity

I'm nearly three or four times a week! – Vincenzo, Italian male (widowed)

5.2.1.3 Getting to the lunches

Some of the organisations provided transport to lunch club attendees through a bus or private vehicle. Attendees utilised this service if available, or would drive themselves, come with friends or catch public transport to the lunches. One participant mentioned that he lived far away from the lunch location, and if he were not able to drive himself, he might find attendance challenging. This was the only barrier to attending discussed by participants, however this was not something that was explored in-depth.

5.2.1.4 Changes to the lunches over time

Reflecting on their experiences of attending the lunches, participants commented on the change in numbers of attendees over the years, with numbers growing and the groups becoming bigger.

Because at that time, you know, we do supply the food but there's only one lady do the cooking...but now it's different. You know, every time – maybe, depends on the day, sometimes 40 or 50 people. This group has gotten much bigger now. – Cameron, Chinese male (married)

We are the biggest group here. Even I pass – a few people pass away I'm always more – getting more instead of getting less – George, Greek male (widowed)

Although length of time and frequency of attendance varied among participants, it was clear that participants all enjoyed attending and had no plans to stop doing so any time soon. It became evident throughout the focus groups that the groups are popular and an appreciated activity in the community, as demonstrated by the rising number of attendees.

5.2.2 Services involved in the shared lunches

5.2.2.1 The lunch and other activities

All the shared lunch gatherings involve a cooked lunch, prepared on-site, usually by volunteers. The food is culturally appropriate and prepared from fresh ingredients just prior to the lunches being served. Participants most commonly paid a nominal fee (around \$5) or their lunch was covered as part of their Commonwealth Home Care Package.

In addition to the lunches, all organisations offer other recreational activities, for example exercise classes, information sessions, craft lessons or entertainment (singers, bingo, games). Participants particularly enjoyed the exercise classes, where they were offered (Chinese and Italian groups) and the health information sessions provided by health

professionals (Chinese). They viewed these sessions as beneficial to their health, providing them the opportunity to move and receive information they might otherwise not have access to.

Number one I go there, I'm doing exercises and, number two, we also have the workshop or the talk. You know sometimes they get the doctors to come and talk to us – Peter, Chinese male (married)

Some organisations arranged trips or celebrations for holidays and special occasions. Participants in both the Italian and Ukrainian group discussed celebratory lunches for attendees' birthdays, where there would be singing, celebrating and in some cases special food and alcohol made available. These activities were welcomed and anticipated by participants.

Sometimes there's singing or doing something, like somebody has birthday or they're it's something different like Australia Day or other things. We come in, or New Year, we come in for company to be together and enjoying time. – Anastasia, Ukrainian female (widowed)

5.2.2.2 Volunteer contribution

Volunteers were generally responsible for procuring and cooking food, helping to serve the lunches, and in some cases joining in to eat with the attendees. Participants spoke fondly of the volunteers and appreciated their efforts. In most cases, the volunteers themselves were elderly.

You see, the volunteers, they need a bit of rest. You see, I've got a lady there, she works from 1995 and she's 86 years old and she's still working in the kitchen so – George, Greek male (widowed)

Three participants across two focus groups were volunteers themselves. This meant that they not only contributed to the running of the lunches but also participated in them. These participants had already started cutting back their volunteer involvement in running the lunches and were moving towards greater participation in the lunches as attendees.

Four of us were doing the cooking before but until 1994, yeah, because I have a kidney transplant and after that I stopped doing the cooking but I'm still involving in the volunteer work, doing – you know, helping around. – Leila, Chinese female (married)

5.2.3 Experience of attending the shared lunches

5.2.3.1 Overall positive experience

Overall, participants across all focus groups spoke of the shared lunches positively. Participants described the lunches as ‘fun’, ‘important’ and ‘lovely’, and it was common for participants to describe them as contributing to their wellbeing, by supporting the development and continuation of positive emotions.

It's important for me, I'm interested, I have friends, I want to talk to them. I like to come here. It's only when I'm sick I don't come here, otherwise I come. – Natalia, Ukrainian female (widowed)

What can I say? I'm happy about everything. Everything's very nice. People looking after us are good. The food is good; very nice. Have a good time. Whatever we ask for, we get it. We are happy, very happy. – Helene, Greek female (widowed)

I'm very bored if I'm at home and then when I come out and meet my friends and mix with my friends, I feel much better. – Peter, Chinese male (married)

I like come here – If I don't come here I feel not well. – Natalia, Ukrainian female (widowed)

Participants also described the lunches as helpful for their physical health. The exercise classes were helpful for keeping participants fit and healthy, and the information sessions provided useful advice for participants to employ at home.

A: Before – I was sick before. Now I reckon I'm healthy

Researcher: From coming to these, doing exercises, eating lunch?

A: Yeah.

– A: Alice, Chinese female (married)

Researcher: Do you think that coming to these lunches contributes to your wellbeing and your quality of life?

V: Oh yes; yes. Helps a lot.

A: Yes, it does, especially the gymnastics that we do. I have a broken back and doing gymnastic it feels better. Before I go swimming down, down, down, down worse. I'm going to gymnastic and I do it willingly and they teach me a lot to do it at home – Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

- V: Vincenzo, Italian male (widowed), A: Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

Most participants also found the lunches easy to attend, either because they lived close by, or because the organisation arranged transport for them. The lunches were deemed

convenient because it meant participants did not have to cook or purchase their lunches elsewhere, which provided them with practical assistance.

I'm happy to come because I can't walk properly. I can't see even to cross the road so I'm happy because they come and pick me up in front of my home and bring me back. – Giulia, Italian female, (widowed)

Very convenient for me. Very convenient for me after my exercises and then there's lunch and then I don't have to go look for lunch. – Alice, Chinese female (married)

5.2.3.2 Something to look forward to

Participants unanimously described looking forward to the lunches. It was clearly something that they enjoyed attending, and it was a social outing that they looked forward to with much anticipation.

Yes, I look forward every day. I used to come here four times a week, five times a week. Now I cut down to three because I'm travelling a lot. – Vincenzo, Italian male (widowed)

We can't wait to see Friday. – Basil, Greek male (widowed)

Participants would go to many lengths to ensure they were able to attend the lunches, by scheduling other appointments and plans around the lunches. One participant told her friends and family to avoid calling her on lunch days, because she would not be available.

I organise my appointments Tuesday, every second Tuesday, and Friday no appointments – Petra, Greek female (widowed)

That's correct, I would like to come here. Someone want to call me, I say telephone me not on Wednesday, telephone me on other day. – Natalia, Ukrainian female (widowed)

The main reason participants had to miss a lunch was due to medical appointments they were unable to change.

N: Important appointments at hospital, for example, we cannot change, so we have to miss.

Il: If we can change, we change.

- N: Natalia, Ukrainian female (widowed), Il: Ilya, Ukrainian male (widowed)

Yeah, if we have to do something else, if we go there because it's necessary, seeing a doctor or something, then we look forward to the next week to come back –

Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

5.2.3.3 Expectations and improvements

When discussing their initial expectations of the lunches, participants mostly found that their expectations were met and, in some cases, were exceeded. Some participants did not know what to expect when attending for the first time, and others were simply looking to meet new people and make some friends.

When I first came I just want to join the association so that I can meet some people and make some friends... Now I've got more friends and now there's more as the Chinese population is growing – Peter, Chinese male (married)

No, I didn't really know what was going on. You know I just...I try and never look back. – Vincenzo, Italian male (widowed)

When asked about potential improvements to the programs, there were few suggestions. The most common suggestion across groups was greater variety and higher quality food. However, participants were aware that the organisations did the best with what they had and acknowledged that limited funds might act as a barrier.

Yeah perhaps they can make some changes, but sometimes they can, sometimes they are not able to do...It would be better for us. It's not easy to change the menu because they have limited budget. – Ivan, Ukrainian male (married)

I think definitely there is room to improve but at the moment all the dishes are okay and suitable for us to eat and suitable for the elderly. – Leila, Chinese female (married)

Others suggested that more funding would provide better transportation services for attendees or would allow them to go on more group outings outside of the regular shared lunches. One participant in the Ukrainian focus group suggested people coming to talk to attendees regarding healthy food to prevent illness.

And other thing got to improve is to get them out more, you know, take them more for trips and take them out to see the country and that is costing money. Without having the money you can't do it, so instead of two trips a year I could have four. – George, Greek male (widowed)

Maybe we also should come together and talk about healthy food, what's healthy for older people so they cannot be sick. Ask people or explain people what the food is better or other things for people with – aged people. – Anastasia, Ukrainian female (widowed)

5.2.4 Food served at the shared lunches

5.2.4.1 Suitability of food provided

Although participants suggested improvements in the food served at the lunches, they were mostly happy with what was provided. Lunches were described as healthy, good value and both culturally and age appropriate. Participants appreciated that the food was traditional and cooked in traditional ways, helping to solidify their cultural ties with one another. It was also important to participants that the food be easy to eat and age appropriate, and the low cost of the meals was a bonus.

Lunch is pretty heathy because a lot of salads all the time and some Ukrainian foods and in all cases they're pretty healthy food – Ilya, Ukrainian male (widowed)

The lunches are prepared by the volunteers so it's cheaper than you going to the food court, or wherever, and then another thing, the volunteers are Chinese or Asians and then whatever they cook is to our liking, you know, the taste. They know how to cook the food we like, yes... Another thing, because we're more senior group the food, the rice is a bit softer and then the food they cook is a bit softer, not too crunchy, because – and then we find it difficult to eat, chew, if it's too hard. – Peter, Chinese male (married)

5.2.4.2 Importance of the lunch itself

Not only was the food appreciated and suitable, but it was an important source of nutrition and sustenance for some participants. The food itself was rated as an important part of coming to the lunches, particularly for those who lived alone, or who had recently lost a spouse.

...so I am enjoying it, especially because I live on my own. It's a great help for me. – Ilya, Ukrainian male (widowed)

People who live by themselves it's really good that they have a good, hot meal and like in the night-time, you know, they can do just with the... – Giulia, Italian female (widowed)

Although the quality/type of food was perceived as important, for most participants it was not the driving motivator for attending the lunches. Rather, the chance to socialise, see old

friends and make new ones, were cited as the main reason for attendance.

It's got nothing to do with the actual meal that's provided, it's the psychological aspect. It's the company. – Nicholas, Greek male (married) & George, Greek male (widowed)

It's not food that's much important, that it's socialisation here socialising. – Ivan, Ukrainian male (married)

5.2.5 Importance of attending the shared lunches

5.2.5.1 Importance of social interaction

The value of social interaction and communication was frequently discussed by participants across the focus groups. It was apparent that participants attended lunches for the opportunity to socialise and connect with other human beings. Others stated they used the socialisation to momentarily forget their loneliness and their grief they had experienced, as well as to share jokes, laugh and be happy.

That's why we come to places like this, to forget a little bit and tell jokes, can talk – Basil, Greek male (widowed)

Participants described feeling lonely and bored at home, and that attending lunches provided an opportunity for entertainment and socialisation. Many of the participants lived alone, so getting out and socialising was one of the few opportunities they had to connect or communicate with anyone, which was perceived as extremely beneficial.

No, by staying home you feel lonely, and lonely, and lonely and you give up. Going out you open up, you're ready to talk to a mixture of people and you feel good. Feel better, not good, feel better. – Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

Friends and conversation, they're very important... I can't live without friends because what's life? It look like you're in prison if you have no friends and you don't go out, you know? At least to come over here, you know, it's a day out for me – Giulia, Italian female (widowed)

Participants stated that not having the opportunity to get out of the house and socialise would have a negative impact on their mental health. One participant even described the physical health benefits of eating with others.

Il: It's lonely to stay all the time. Yes, very important.

Iv: It's not only important, it's a must... Yes because you can go cuckoo.

- Il: Ilya, Ukrainian male (widowed) Iv: Ivan, Ukrainian male (married)

It is better, yeah. Eating by yourself, lonely, you don't digest properly because you have a stomach tied up. – Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

These comments collectively demonstrate how important company and socialisation are for elderly CALD populations. Not only are they physically limited by their age, but their limited confidence speaking English could in some cases isolate them further and perpetuate loneliness.

They just shut themselves at home because they're not used to going out to the clubs and hotels and things like that. We don't know the language, so they keep themselves at home, so that's why. – Nicholas, Greek male (married)

Frequent attendance at the lunches, with the comfort of communicating in their native language, meant that attendees met and communicated with new people, making new friends. This aspect of the lunches was highly valued by participants.

5.2.5.2 Importance for wellbeing

As noted earlier, lunches provided attendees with an opportunity to socialise, connect with one another and make friends. In this way, the sense of community that is developed through cultural lunches provided a source of respite and support for many attendees.

Many lunch club attendees are widows who live alone, and many of the participants in the focus groups described experiencing social isolation. Shared lunches helped to combat the loneliness that was commonly experienced by participants.

For me it is very important. Very important. I live on my own and I'm waiting for it to come here because, you know yourself, it's very – I always used to live together I have family but when family's gone, wife died I am on my own. For me, it's very, very important to come for social and then again, it's very good, very good pleasurable lunch I have. I come home, I don't have to cook or something like that. It's very important to me. – Ilya, Ukrainian male (widowed)

As attendees come from similar backgrounds, and many are experiencing or have experienced similar life events (debilitating illnesses, injuries, loss of spouses) which means that they are able to provide support to one another. This support was greatly valued by participants, and they appeared to enjoy providing support to others as well. Particularly with the loss of a spouse, participants were ready to help others through their grieving. In some cases, when participants were ill, other lunch club attendees also came to visit them in the hospital.

When they say – the lady, her husband was 92 when he died ‘I feel depressed’. I said ‘don’t feel depressed, you had your full life with your husband’. I mean my husband – [I lost a] daughter, she was 44 and then I had a lot of problem and I got the kids home with me and then I lost my husband. I said ‘I’m not going to thinking to feel depressed’ – Giulia, Italian female (widowed)

2000 I had the bypass, in the year 2000... There’s a group that they come and visit me. You know, that people care about you and then they come and visit you and make you feel good. – Peter, Chinese male (married)

Not only were the lunches an opportunity to socialise, but they were an opportunity to leave the home. Many participants were not able to drive or leave the house regularly, which meant that the lunches were welcomed as an opportunity to do so:

Sometimes somebody tell me the podiatrist coming to my home to cut my fingernails but I say ‘I don’t want to come into my home’ because when somebody come into my home I cannot go anywhere, otherwise I might have a chance to go outside and see people or podiatrist, or other things, I feel different because I go from house.

– Anastasia, Ukrainian female (widowed)

Then you don’t feel bored, you see, and then also instead of doing nothing, looking at the television, I think it’s good to go out and be more happy, yeah, than staying at home doing nothing. – Leila, Chinese female (married)

For some participants, it was also a way to get some respite from home. While many participants spoke of feeling bored at home and having nothing to do, others were busy doing housework and looking after grandchildren. For these individuals, leaving home meant a break from their chores, and an opportunity to relax. This also appeared to provide peace of mind to their children, who were happy that their parent was out of the house, socialising and enjoying themselves.

Because I don’t go anywhere. I mean I have a plenty to do at home because I got a full family but at least once in a while – you know, once every week I come here, have a bit of rest from home. – Giulia, Italian female (widowed)

My son, he write my name at four clubs...“mum, don’t worry about nothing. You go there, pass the time nicely. You come home, everything’s okay. Don’t worry about nothing” he said to me – Petra, Greek female (widowed)

5.2.5.3 Importance for culture and language

There was a clear sense from participants that shared lunches were important for

maintaining their cultural identity and cultural links in the community. Participants stated that most of the cultural events that are held in the community are held at night, making it difficult for them to attend due to their age. Lunches provided a great opportunity for participants to connect with people who come from the same, or similar cultural backgrounds, eat foods that were familiar to them and reminisce about old times, including the experience of migration and settling into a new country.

I like to come here because it's our food, it's our language. One time a week, coming here. – Veronica, Ukrainian female (widowed)

Well, back a long time ago, to be honest, at that time in Adelaide there's not many Chinese people and when you see the Chinese people you feel so happy, you go 'oh, it's home' you see? So, that's why we join, you know, and helping each other. Besides, it's not only helping each other - and we can talk, you know, about the life back in your old country so we can really communicate and you feel good so that's why I keep on coming. – Cameron, Chinese male (married)

For participants who were not confident in speaking English, they found it particularly difficult to connect and communicate with people in the community. Coming to the lunches where people speak the same language was extremely important for them, as they could communicate with comfort and confidence. For some participants, there were not many other avenues to speak their native language outside of these groups. Even for participants who did have other opportunities to speak their native language with others, there was something different about being able to communicate in these groups, in this particular setting. Two participants described it as a feeling of 'home', feeling more comfortable, like they were with 'family'.

L: I think we have other venues that we can go to since we can speak the language but coming to the Chinese Welfare I think is like – you know...

C: You feel more comfortable. Home.

L:...it feel more comfortable and feel like, you know, going to a big group, you know, it's like a family.

- L: Leila, Chinese female (married) C: Cameron, Chinese male (married)

We can express ourselves more with the Italian because everybody talk the same and we understand each other better. – Antonio, Italian male (widowed)

It was especially appreciated that the volunteers and organisation staff were of the same cultural background as the participants. Being able to communicate with them with ease was instrumental to their enjoyment and participation at the lunches.

All of the staff, they're all Italian, you know, and it's different. I mean like for me personal, if I have to go to English, you know, it doesn't worry me that much, but to have Italian people in charge that's different, you know, you can explain always a bit better or they will understand you better, put it that way. - Giulia, Italian female (widowed)

5.2.5.4 Importance for health

While assessing the impact the lunches had on the health of participants was one of our research objectives, it was not something that was explicitly brought up during the focus groups. Participants alluded to the lunches being beneficial for health in more wholistic ways. For example, the lunches that were provided were healthy and balanced and the exercises that were offered helped keep them physically fit. The company and socialisation helped prevent isolation and loneliness, which in turn prevented them from being bored and going 'mental'. Loneliness has been identified as a potential factor in social isolation and depression, and the participants vocalised their understanding of this in different ways, generally stating it kept them from getting ill.

N: Sometimes I don't want to go because I'm ill, but my daughter told me 'go, be among people and you'll be better'.

Researcher: And do you feel better?

N: Yes, that's correct. She tells me go be among people because you are doing all the time something, some housework. Just go and enjoy yourself.

- N: Natalia, Ukrainian female (widowed)

C: Because I feel that you go out, you need to use your brain to talk with people you know. When you sit at home you just close your eyes and sleep you know.

L: Yeah, better for your health too.

C: It's much, much better for your health, make you more mobile.

- C: Cameron, Chinese male (married) L: Leila, Chinese female (married)

5.2.6 Impacting life outside of the shared lunches

The lunches not only provided opportunities for socialisation at the club, but also impacted participants in other ways. Participants, if they were able, would meet up outside of the lunches to socialise, drink coffee and eat food. This was most apparent in the Chinese group and was perhaps attributed to the younger ages of participants (only one participant was over 80 in this group, whereas the majority of participants in the other groups were over 80 years old).

L: Every now and then we go out to dinner.

C: Go out together.

- C: Cameron, Chinese male (married) L: Leila, Chinese female (married)

B: Different houses we have a cup of coffee and we have a talk and things like that. – Basil, Greek male (widowed)

While this was an option for mobile participants, others who were not as active did not frequently see other attendees outside of the shared lunches. In some cases, phone calls were the best option for communication in between lunches.

5.2.7 Life difficulties

While not the focus of our questioning, discussions around life difficulties arose across the focus groups. Many participants were experiencing and had experienced many difficulties and hardships in life. They were often vocal about the barriers they faced when they first moved to Australia, feeling unable to communicate and feeling isolated from their new countrymen. Even now, some participants felt that they could not easily connect or communicate with others in the community.

A: When I'm in the garden, they could just say hello.

Iv: My old neighbour where I live, he doesn't even say hello to me.

V: I live in a new area. All young people live there. You know when you see the neighbours, 'hello' that's it.

- A: Anastasia, Ukrainian female (widowed) Iv: Ivan, Ukrainian male (married) V: Veronica, (Ukrainian female widowed)

More recently participants were dealing with changes in home life such as children moving out of home, spouses passing away, and developing illnesses and injuries leaving them unable to participate in activities in the same way they previously could.

Iv: Because I sit at home by myself.

Il: Lonely at home.

Iv: Where else can I go? Now in my years, no one needs you.

- Iv: Ivan, Ukrainian male (married) Il: Ilya, Ukrainian male (widowed)

...my son, he said 'mum you can't stay at home self' because I said 'I'm missing my grandchildren. I can't go out with my grandchildren. I'm missing my cooking. I'm missing my shopping, I can't go shopping. I can't go – I couldn't go nowhere. – Maria, Italian female (married)

There are some things – if you're married for 56 years, like me, and they lost it – my wife, she gone three months in the hospital and she never come back. You know how difficult it is. I can't take it out of my mind. Every second day I go to the cemetery to bless her, every second day. What you gonna do? It's a bit hard. – Basil, Greek male (widowed)

Loss and loneliness due to losing a spouse or loved one was particularly prevalent among participants. Discussions around coping and dealing with loss were common, and participants stated the company and friendships formed by coming to the lunches helped with overcoming their feelings of loss and grief. Participants demonstrated resilience, as they did not want to sit at home, feeling lonely and grieving. They did not want to be kept at home unable to do the things they used to do. They made an effort to come to the lunches, to socialise and to participate, and they reaped the benefits of doing so.

G: I feel sad too but you have to carry on. You have to think...

V: Can't stop.

- G: Giulia, Italian female (widowed) V: Vincenzo, Italian male (widowed)

6 Discussion

6.1 Key findings

The purpose of this research was to gain an understanding of the experiences of attending cultural shared lunch gatherings among elderly CALD populations, and to explore the health and wellbeing benefits attendees may receive from participating in these events. Our results clearly demonstrate a perceived benefit to health and wellbeing for elderly individuals who participate in shared cultural lunches. The key findings of this research are:

- Long term and frequent attendance at shared lunches
- Appreciation and gratitude for services and volunteer input
- Attendance at lunches is important, prioritised and something to look forward to
- The lunches provide company, an opportunity to leave the house, a nourishing meal and entertainment
- Cultural identity is maintained through cultural focus and interaction at the lunches
- The lunches facilitate communication and social interaction, helping to prevent and/or minimise loneliness and isolation

All participants had attended lunches over an extensive period, and none wanted to stop attending, indicating that participants found them enjoyable. The fact that many participants described these groups growing larger over the years also indicates that they are a popular

and desired activity for elderly CALD individuals in the community.

Across all organisations the lunches were largely, if not entirely, run by volunteers. Participants demonstrated gratitude towards the volunteers, recognising that many of them were elderly themselves. They appreciated the effort volunteers went to, providing healthy, culturally appropriate food, and support and services to the attendees, sometimes above and beyond what was expected. Some of the participants themselves were volunteers or contributed to the lunches in some way. The ability of elderly immigrants to participate and contribute to culturally focused events has been shown to help strengthen cultural ties and gain a sense of purpose in their host country¹⁸. Without volunteers the shared lunch gatherings would not happen. Attendees highly valued this service and the benefits they appear to gain from attending demonstrate the importance of volunteer work.

Participants were aware of the limitations faced by the organisations in providing the lunches, acknowledging the limited amount of funding they receive for this service. The few suggestions participants made for improving the lunches were always said in recognition of these limitations. Participants desired more variety with food options but recognised that the organisations did not have the capacity to run like a restaurant, with limited cooks and limited funds for ingredients. Other suggestions involved providing more trips outside of the lunches or providing information sessions on healthy eating for the elderly. Participants did not appear to have any issues with the way the lunches were run, the fees they had to pay or the services they received.

Participants did not have particularly high expectations upon first attending the lunches, and in some cases, had no expectations at all. Participants spoke of wanting to be able to communicate with other people, connect with people from their background, to get out of the house and socialise. In these ways, the lunches went above and beyond many of the participant's expectations. They were a perfect opportunity to encourage connection and communication between cultural brothers and sisters. Other research has found that for elderly immigrants living in a new country, connections with others are crucial for developing their sense of belonging and helping to sustain health and wellbeing¹¹. From discussions with our participants, it appears that this holds true, their connection with other people was rated as highly important and valued as contributing to their health and wellbeing.

The overwhelmingly positive experiences associated with coming to shared lunches is testament to how beneficial they are to those who attend. The participants discussed clear positive benefits for themselves, and in some cases their family members. For example, it became evident that some family members, primarily adult children, felt good knowing their

parents were out of the house, socialising and relaxing. The shared lunches were something participants looked forward to, avoiding making plans or booking appointments, when possible, on the days they expected to attend.

The fact that the lunches are culturally focussed helped foster cultural connections within and among individuals. While participants discussed other cultural events that occur in the community, there were often barriers to attendance, whereas the lunches provided a convenient way to connect with their cultural identity. This was not just through the culturally appropriate foods served, but also through the communication in their native language. For many participants, there were not many people they met out and about that spoke the same language or were from a similar background. The shared lunch gatherings provided a place for culturally similar individuals to connect with one another and their culture. A study conducted in 2015 found that participation in cultural activities in immigrants was beneficial to psychological health and wellbeing¹⁹, and previous research in this area has demonstrated that participants with stronger ethnic attachments report lower levels of loneliness²⁰. It would appear that for this population group, participating in culturally familiar activities is highly important for mental health and wellbeing.

The food provided through the lunches was appreciated, and deemed culturally appropriate, tasty and healthy. For a few participants, particularly those who lived alone, the food also provided a nutritious meal that they may otherwise not have had access to. However, despite being described as culturally appropriate, the food was not a driving motivator for why participants attended the lunches. Instead participants sought the social interaction and communication that the shared meal provided, whereas the meal itself was just a 'bonus'.

More importantly, shared lunch gatherings provided an opportunity for individuals to leave the house and connect with others. Aside from the cultural and communication benefits of connecting with those from a similar background, just being able to spend the day out of the house connecting with another human was highly valued by participants. Previous research has shown that there is a strong relationship between the amount of time an individual spends alone and loneliness, with those who spend more time alone being more vulnerable to experiencing loneliness²¹. Participants in our study described being bored at home and going 'mental' without connecting and communicating with others. One participant even stated that he did not digest food as well when not in the company of other people. For these individuals it was important to get out of the house and be with people, to help minimise feelings of loneliness and isolation. Participants even stated that coming to the lunches and communicating with one another was a way to forget about the challenges and hardships they had faced.

Shared lunches were not only helpful for fostering social ties within the context of the lunch gatherings themselves, they also extended to other areas of life outside of the lunches. This was beautifully demonstrated by Peter from the Chinese group, who was visited in hospital by his fellow lunch attendees. Other participants mentioned connecting with each other outside of the shared lunches, either individually or as a group. Previous research has shown that developing and expanding the size of one's social networks provides the emotional support needed to help reduce experiences of loneliness²⁰. Social networks comprising of friends have been shown to have more of a protective impact on loneliness than relatives, neighbours and children²¹. In this way, cultural organisations fostered social connection and networks among their participants, which is crucial for minimising the experience of loneliness.

While the lunches themselves were not often discussed in light of their health benefits, it was evident that the lunches were beneficial to the health of participants through the mechanisms of building social connection, fostering wellbeing and cultural identity. The other activities, particularly exercise and information sessions, were often described as healthful, increasing mobility, flexibility and strength. Participants often noted that they felt better, or healthier, after attending lunches, thus suggesting that social connection supports their mental and physical health².

6.2 Strengths and limitations

The cultural diversity among the focus groups is a strength of this research. Where previous studies have focused primarily on Asian immigrants^{11, 18}, our research spanned cultures, providing more representation of how different immigrants from different cultures experience shared lunches. There also appears to be a substantial amount of research on elderly immigrants who have recently moved countries^{11, 18-20}. Our research is unique in that it explored experiences of those who have been living in Australia for over 20 years. Although we did not have bilingual researchers conducting the interviews, conducting the focus groups with an accredited interpreter facilitating the conversation is an appropriate method to use²².

The observations prior to the focus groups were a strength of this research, as they enabled the researchers to become familiar with the premises, the running of the lunches and the attendees themselves. This also allowed the attendees to familiarise themselves with the researchers, recognising them as a familiar face when the time came for the focus groups. Having two researchers present throughout the interviews was also a strength of this research. It allowed one researcher to focus on facilitating the group, without having to note down participant reactions and responses, as this was deemed the responsibility of the

second researcher. This proved immensely useful when transcribing audio recordings and analysing data.

While this research has many strengths, there are also some limitations that must be acknowledged. The overall consensus from our focus group participants were that shared lunch events were positive, however because we only interviewed frequent attendees of these lunches, we were less likely to get a negative view of the lunches. We only engaged individuals who had been attending lunches for over 6 months in order to get an understanding of the experience from those who were very familiar with them. This is a potential limitation to this study, as these individuals obviously experience some benefit and enjoyment from attending, otherwise they would probably stop frequenting the events. We did not interview those who had recently started attending, those who had attended previously but stopped or those who had never attended, therefore we do not have any representation of their experiences of the lunches, why they may have stopped attending or why they may not wish to attend.

Assistance with participant recruitment was sought from each individual organisation's staff to help overcome language barriers between research staff and participants. This could have potentially resulted in selection bias as organisational staff may have selected participants they knew would speak fondly of the lunches and the organisation. However, we endeavoured to avoid this by providing the organisations with a set of eligibility criteria to approach potential participants.

This research aimed to represent a variety of cultural backgrounds; however, we were only able to reach four different cultural groups. Australia is one of the most multi-cultural nations in the world, and this selection does not accurately reflect the multitude of cultural backgrounds that make up this country. Having said this, we worked with cultural groups that represent a large proportion of migrants in the community. It is important to note that other groups were approached, however not all organisations were interested and not all groups had attendees who desired to participate. There were also funding limitations that prevented prolonged recruitment for this project.

Conducting focus groups with the assistance of an accredited interpreter is an appropriate method to use when conducting cross-cultural research. This research may have also benefitted from a multi-lingual, culturally appropriate researcher, who could speak the same language as participants. The benefit to having the interpreter in-situ means that there is no delay in interpreting responses and the conversation can flow relatively easily. However, there are limitations to using this method, such as interpreters' mis-interpreting or

summarising participant responses, and the length of time taken to ask questions and hear responses. Again however, we sought to ensure that interpreters stayed true to participant responses, and explicitly asked them to avoid summarising participant responses, or grouping together individual responses where possible. The fact that the interpreters were accredited and sourced from an independent organisation adds strength to this research.

7 Conclusion

Shared lunch gatherings offered at cultural organisations are highly valued and important to elderly CALD individuals in the community. The social connection and communication, the opportunity to leave the house and the cultural experience of attending all contributed to an improved sense of perceived health and wellbeing for participants.

Through the social connection and building of social ties described, it is evident that shared lunches play a role in fostering social capital among elderly CALD groups. Lunches provided an opportunity to connect with other individuals, to build trust and friendships. While friendships and bonds started at the lunches, for many participants, they extended beyond the social gatherings offered by the cultural organisations. Participants were able to form a community of like-minded individuals, from similar cultural backgrounds, with similar life experiences, that could support one another within and outside the lunch club gatherings.

8 Recommendations

Suggested implications for policy and practice

- c) The shared lunches provided by cultural organisations in the community are highly valued by those who attend and add much to the wellbeing of participants. Continued support both financially and in external service provision is recommended.
- d) To extend participation, the promotion of CALD shared lunches at medical (general) practices, libraries, councils and centres of religious worship is recommended.

Suggested areas for future investigation/research relating to CALD shared lunches

- e) The age of the shared lunch attendees (average age ~80 years) suggests that issues of succession planning and sustainability should be explored;
- f) Identification and connection with those who would benefit from these cultural shared lunches but as yet are not attending should be explored;
- g) The barriers and facilitators to attending the lunches, including financial and transport issues, and how this may impact attendance at the shared lunches should be explored;

- h) Improved social connection provided through these shared lunches is important to this demographic and age group. To fully determine the social return on investment (SROI) and the benefits to individuals and the CALD community overall, it is recommended that SROI analysis be conducted to assist in future funding and service provision models.

9 Acknowledgements

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11 Appendices

Appendix 1 Information sheet



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CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

INFORMATION SHEET

(for *'focus groups'*)

Title: 'Can sharing meals increase social capital?: Assessing social and health values of shared meals provided at Cultural and Linguistically Diverse support groups'

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Description of the study

This study is part of the project titled 'Can sharing meals increase social capital?: Assessing social and health values of shared meals provided at Cultural and Linguistically Diverse support groups'. This project will investigate the experiences of those who attend the MCCSA lunch clubs.

Purpose of the study

This project aims to find out whether the shared meals offered at the MCCSA lunch clubs have a social and health benefit for Cultural and Linguistically Diverse group recipients.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to attend a focus group with a researcher who will ask you simple questions regarding your views about the lunch clubs on offer at MCCSA. Participation is entirely voluntary. The focus group will take about 45 minutes to 1 hour. The discussion will be audio recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with reviewing the results. Once recorded, the audio will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file, and will only be destroyed if the transcript is checked by the participant.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

The sharing of your experiences will enable us to gain an understanding of what you think of the lunch clubs in order to ensure that the services provided are the best.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

We do not need your name and you will be anonymous to everyone outside of your focus group – unfortunately, due to the nature of focus groups, you will not be anonymous to those who are participating in the same focus group as you, but you will be anonymous to everyone else. Any identifying information will be removed, and your comments will not be linked directly to you. All information and results obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, with access restricted to relevant researchers.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study, however, given the nature of the project, some participants could experience emotional discomfort. If any emotional discomfort is experienced please contact Migrant Health Service on (08) 8237 3900 for support / counselling that may be accessed free of charge by all participants. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions, and you are free to withdraw from the focus group at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and send it back to me at

*Georgia Middleton
International Research Collective in Food, Culture and Health
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Recognition of contribution / time / travel costs

If you would like to participate, in appreciation of your contribution and time, we would like to offer you a \$20.00 voucher. This voucher will be provided to you in person on completion of the focus group session.

How will I receive feedback?

On project completion, outcomes of the project will be given to all participants via poster distribution at the MCCSA.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: 8001). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project only, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on (08) 8201 3116, by fax on (08) 8201 2035, or by email to human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 2 Modified information sheet



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CRICOS Provider No. 00114A

INFORMATION SHEET (for 'focus groups')

Title: 'Can sharing meals increase social capital?: Assessing social and health values of shared meals provided at Cultural and Linguistically Diverse support groups'

Researcher

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Description of the study

This project will investigate the experiences of those who attend shared lunch clubs at their cultural organisation.

Purpose of the study

This project aims to find out whether shared meals have a social and health benefit for Cultural and Linguistically Diverse group recipients.

What will I be asked to do?

You are invited to attend a focus group with a researcher who will ask you simple questions regarding your views about the shared lunches, that will take about 45 minutes to 1 hour. The discussion will be audio recorded and will be typed-up and stored as a computer file.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

By participating in this study you are getting the opportunity to share your experience of attending these shared lunches, and how they have impacted your life, health and wellbeing.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

You will be anonymous to everyone outside of your focus group. Any identifying information will be removed, and your comments will not be linked directly to you. Everything obtained in this study will be stored in a secure way, and only accessed by relevant researchers.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study, however, if any emotional discomfort is experienced please contact Migrant Health Service on (08) 8237 3900 for support / counselling that may be accessed free of charge. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions, and you are free to withdraw from the focus group at any time without effect or consequences.

Recognition of contribution / time / travel costs

In appreciation of your contribution and time, we would like to offer you a \$20.00 voucher. This voucher will be provided to you in person on completion of the focus group session.

How will I receive feedback?

On project completion, outcomes of the project will be given to all participants via poster distribution at your organisation.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet, and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: 8001). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project only, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on (08) 8201 3116, by fax on (08) 8201 2035, or by email to human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 3 Consent form



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**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH
(Focus Group)**

Can sharing meals increase social capital?: Assessing social and health values of shared meals provided at Cultural and Linguistically Diverse support groups.

I

being over the age of 18 years, hereby consent to participate as requested in the focus group for the research project with the title listed above.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - Participation is entirely voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the project at any time; and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While I can withdraw from participation at any time I cannot withdraw the information I have provided or ask that the recording be stopped.
 - While no identifying information will be published, due to the nature of focus groups anonymity cannot be guaranteed.
 - Although participation will not be anonymous, I should protect the identity of participants and confidentiality of all discussions that occur within the group to minimise risks to participants.
 - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to me.
6. I agree/do not agree* to the tape/transcript* being made available to other researchers who are not members of this research team, but who are judged by the research team to be doing related research, on condition that my identity is not revealed.

** delete as appropriate*

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....**Date**.....

I, the interpreter certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Interpreter's name.....

Interpreter's signature.....**Date**.....

I, the researcher certify that the study has been explained to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name.....

Researcher's signature.....**Date**.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 8001). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project please contact the Executive Officer on (08) 8201 3116 or human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix 4 Focus group interview schedule

Focus Group Questions

Research Objective(s):

1. To explore the experiences of participants of shared meals that are part of the regular meetings of cultural and linguistically diverse groups
2. To appraise the extent to which shared meals play a role in the health and wellbeing of recipients

General questions around attendance at shared lunches

- 1. For how long have you been attending these shared lunches?**
- 2. How did you hear about them?**
- 3. Who organised for you to sign up to the lunches?**

Importance of shared lunches – what the experience means to them, what they get out of it

- 4. How important is it that you attend the shared lunches?**
 - a. What makes you want to attend the shared lunches?
 - b. Do you look forward to attending the shared lunches?
- 5. How do you feel if you miss one of the lunches?**
 - a. Do you arrange other things in your life around the shared lunches?
- 6. Are there any times when the shared lunches aren't on? What happens around these times?**
 - a. Do you miss the shared lunches?
 - b. Do you arrange to do other things instead?
- 7. Do you think attending these shared lunches contribute to your quality of life or wellbeing? In what ways?**
- 8. How do your families feel about you attending these shared lunches? Do they encourage you to attend?**

Promoting the shared lunches, getting others involved

9. Have you ever told others about the shared lunches here?
 - a. If so, what have you told them about it?
10. If you were going to explain to others what happens at these shared lunches what would you say?

Increasing socialisation at the shared lunch and in the community

11. To what extent do the shared lunch activities allow you all to get to know each other?
 - a. What sorts of activities are used at the shared lunch to help people get to know each other?
- 12. To what extent do the shared lunches encourage you to contact each other outside of the shared lunch meetings?**
 - a. Can you give any examples where you have had further contact with members outside of the shared lunch meetings?
 - b. Have you made any friends through coming to the shared lunches?
- 13. Some people we have spoken to say that the shared lunches have helped them better cope with being lonely. To what extent do you think this is true?**
 - a. Have you ever felt lonely? Do you think these shared lunches help you to feel less lonely? How/in what ways?
14. Are there any ways in which you or other people coming to the shared lunches can take part in the organisation etc (eg bringing food/recipes to the lunch, etc?)

Shared lunches supporting cultural beliefs and community

- 15. What were your expectations prior to attending the shared lunch and how effectively does it meet/fulfil these expectations?**
16. To what extent do you believe that these shared lunches support and encourage specific cultural beliefs and practices of your community? What are these?

General views of the shared lunches

- 17. What are the best things about the shared lunches?**
- 18. What things may be improved in the shared lunches?**