



Evidence-based tips for enhancing health and wellbeing of Karen people in Bendigo



K Kindness **Quick tips:** Smile. Be Friendly. Display a flag. Say 'Oh chu-ahh' or 'Hah ler gay'.

Good advice: Attending healthcare services can be intimidating – especially for people who are new to Australia or don't speak English well. After decades of mistreatment by authorities in Myanmar and Thailand, Karen people can be fearful of those in authority. A warm welcome and friendly demeanour, rather than a 'professional' manner, can reduce anxiety, and build rapport. Try small signs of welcome, such as displaying a Karen flag or learning and using common Karen greetings and phrases.

A Access **Quick tip:** Provide signs with clear visual instructions or that use Karen language.

Good advice: Karen people face many barriers to accessing health services, including appointment booking systems, transport, and locating services. Try giving instructions and directions in very simple English language or even in Karen language (including for bookings, traveling to services, and where to go on arrival). Good visual aides and maps can help people feel supported and attend their appointments.

R Respect **Quick tip:** Attend awareness/training sessions to learn about Karen culture and refugee experiences.

Good advice: Karen people bring their own understandings of health and wellbeing to healthcare settings. For example, many Karen people view health as an integrated experience of body, emotion, mind and sociality, rather than the prevention or management of specific ailments or conditions. Understanding and respecting Karen knowledge, culture, and values is important both for positive relationships and effective care. (See overleaf for some key Karen concepts relating to health.)

E English **Quick tips:** Try to use face to face interpreters. Allow extra time for translation.

Good advice: For many Karen, language is the single biggest problem to accessing good health care. Interpreters are helpful, especially when they are face-to-face, have medical literacy and speak the appropriate language and dialect. Many Karen people feel that consultation sessions do not allow enough time to understand and be understood. Try to provide longer consultation sessions where possible. Ask follow up questions so that you can check that the information being interpreted is clearly understood.

N Notice **Quick tip:** Watch for people who need help to use your services.

Good advice: Newly-arrived people in Australia are learning a completely new language and way of life. They will not always understand how to use a facility, including how to present at reception when they arrive. If you notice a person in the waiting room who has been sitting for a while, consider approaching them and asking if they need help.



**Please
turn over
for more
information**

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Key terms and concepts in Karen language

Mee ter nay ba = not sleeping

Aw ter we ba = not eating

Common colloquial expressions that more accurately translate to the English expression of 'not feeling quite right', and do not always mean that the person is actually suffering from a sleep disorder, insomnia, or eating disorder. Follow up questions will help to clarify if this is the case.

Thu pwee thaak nyaw = Happy, fresh, healthy

A term that indicates feelings of being physically and emotionally healthy. 'Feeling happy' or 'looking fresh' are ways of talking about being healthy. They mean feeling full of energy, talkative, sociable, and optimistic. A healthy person is communicative, enjoys going out and engaging in activities with friends and neighbours, and is able to contribute to the community. This requires not just a healthy body, but also a healthy mind and emotions. Not being happy/healthy can also be associated with weather extremes, poor food and a lack of 'Ta ghu ta por'.

Ta ghu ta por: has no direct translation in English.

This term indicates having a sense of belonging, unity and connection to a social group. A lack of **Ta ghu ta por** is strongly associated with not feeling emotionally or physically well. It can refer to a feeling of being in an unhealthy or threatening environment and lacking a sense of mutual understanding.

Tha ta cha = disease of the heart

Common colloquial expression that refers to poor health believed to be the result of 'overthinking': stress, depression or anxiety. Karen understand that 'overthinking' can cause a person to become physically unwell. A person with **Tha ta cha** may have a rapid heartbeat or emotional 'heartache', feel less resilient, more vulnerable and less able to cope. Karen are at high risk of **Tha ta cha** due to the challenges of settlement, including financial pressures, family breakdown and cultural change.

Na ka taw = sleep paralysis

Some Karen feel concerned about **Na ka taw**, an experience of sleep paralysis that is widely experienced among Karen people in Bendigo. Karen people say that this happens mostly when their head rests on their hand when sleeping, sleeping on their back instead of on their side, eating too much late at night before going to sleep, or is the result of 'overthinking', being exhausted from manual work or feeling weak.

Depression and Mental Health problems

There is no Karen term for depression, mental illness or psychology, and unlike Western belief systems, Karen cosmology does not distinguish between psychological and physical conditions. Depression is more commonly understood through its symptoms: feeling sad, being unable to sleep, 'overthinking', or symptoms associated with **Tha ta cha**. Mental illness remains largely unacknowledged and stigmatised in the Karen community, requiring additional sensitivity during discussion of diagnosis and treatment.



Key terms in Karen language

Hi

Hi

Gaw ler gay

Good morning

Hello

Hello

Nee ler gay

Good noon

Oh chu-aah?

How are you?

Hah ler gay

Good afternoon

Oh chu

Fine

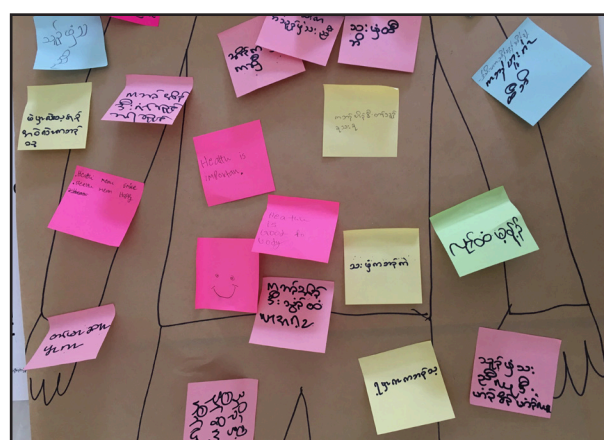
Ner mee

deet lae?

What is your name?

Ta blute

Thank you



These tips and key terms emerged from research workshops with 52 members of Bendigo's Karen community. This resource was developed by La Trobe and Manchester Metropolitan universities researchers, Karen research assistants and Bendigo Community Health Services. Contact Dr Raelene Wilding on r.wilding@latrobe.edu.au for more details.



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