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Participatory Research to Support Health Promotion within Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

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Australia is home to a wide variety of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Evidence suggests that people from CALD backgrounds in developed countries experience greater health inequalities than comparable native born populations in the host country. Health promotion is now recognised as a well-established approach to improving population health and addressing the causes of health inequalities. In order to understand and address health disparities within CALD communities, it is necessary for health promotion practitioners to have access to culturally relevant information about the communities they work with. Participatory research is rapidly emerging in the literature as an important framework for engaging CALD communities in gathering 'local intelligence' about a range of health issues and finding the solutions to address these.

This paper reports on a meta-analysis of qualitative research studies carried out to identify the benefits and challenges of participatory research methodology in supporting health promotion in culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in the Australian context. Twenty studies were reviewed. The benefits identified include: increases in cultural relevance; communities being recognised as experts; and opportunities for co-learning and co-teaching. The challenges identified include high resource demand and intensity; competing community and research expectations; and power imbalances between researchers and participants. It is concluded that participatory research has the potential to increase the effectiveness of health promotion within CALD communities by involving community members, using their knowledge, skills and resources, and increasing the cultural appropriateness of interventions. To support the broader application of participatory research in health promotion a range of policy and practice issues are discussed, and associated recommendations for application within developed countries presented.