

Migrating to Australia a bad health move for immigrants

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Moving to Australia could be a health hazard for thousands of immigrants, according to unique research from Deakin University.

Acclaimed demographer and social epidemiologist Associate Professor Santosh Jatrana from the University's Alfred Deakin Research Institute has found that [immigrants](#) who are healthy when they arrive in Australia end up suffering as many [chronic health conditions](#) as locally born Australians after just 20 years here.

Professor Jatrana's study, undertaken with Dr Samba Siva Rao Pasupuleti (ADRI) and Dr Ken Richardson from the University of Otago, New Zealand, found a disturbing decline in the [health](#) of immigrants in Australia over just two decades.

"These findings have important ramifications for countries with high migrant intakes, including Canada, the UK and the USA, and could impact on international immigration policies," Professor Jatrana said.

The new study, which has been published in *Social Science and Medicine*, is based on data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey and compares the health of immigrants from both English and non-English speaking countries with native born Australians.

Professor Jatrana and her team found a significant difference by nativity status in the reporting of chronic conditions, with immigrants from both

English and non-English speaking countries less likely to report a chronic condition and having fewer chronic conditions compared with native born Australians.

However, the health of both these immigrant groups converged to that of the native born population in terms of reporting [chronic conditions](#) such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, diabetes and respiratory disease after 20 years of stay in Australia.

"Migrant health over the long term could be impacted by the adoption of Australian habits relating to diet, physical activity, smoking and alcohol, as well as the stress of migrating, adjusting to a new culture, and discrimination," Professor Jatrana said.

"While all migrants are at risk of some stress and discrimination because of their overseas born status, characteristics such as visible minority status may place such migrant communities at risk.

"Sociocultural barriers could also impact on some immigrants from accessing preventative health care, such as cancer screening among some immigrant women from certain ethnic groups."

The study noted that barriers which might inhibit the use of preventive health services could include differences in language and culture, income constraints and/or inadequate knowledge of the host country's health care system, in turn contributing to worsening of health over time.

Professor Jatrana said that the findings have serious implications for several countries with large immigrant populations and could impact international immigration policies.

"Chronic diseases are a major cause of death and disability world-wide and all the consequent social, physical and economic effects and burdens

associated with that," Professor Jatrana said.

"An avoidable decline in the health of immigrants the longer they live in their new country undermines one of the main goals of immigration policy."

She said more research is needed to further examine the causes of migrant health decline over time.

"Understanding and addressing risk factors for immigrants is likely to improve the health of everyone."

More information: Santosh Jatrana, Samba Siva Rao Pasupuleti, Ken Richardson, "Nativity, duration of residence and chronic health conditions in Australia: Do trends converge towards the native-born population?", *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 119, October 2014, Pages 53-63, ISSN 0277-9536, [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.08.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.08.008).

Provided by Deakin University

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