# Enhancing Stroke Awareness in Vietnamese Communities in South West Sydney

## The Challenge

Stroke is a leading cause of death and disability in Australia. There are two main types:

- **Ischaemic stroke** (83% of cases), caused by a blockage that stops blood flow to the brain
- **Haemorrhagic stroke** (15% of cases), caused by bleeding in the brain

Getting to hospital quickly is crucial. For ischaemic strokes caused by blood clots, early treatment can dramatically improve recovery, so it's essential that people recognise the common symptoms of stroke.

## Identifying Community Needs

Data showed that Vietnamese-speaking patients in South West Sydney (SWS) had:

- Higher rates of cardiovascular risk factors.
- Lower likelihood of calling an ambulance or presenting early to hospital during a stroke event.

We weren't sure if the Vietnamese community knew about the symptoms of stroke as the FAST acronym:

F – Face (Khuôn mặt): Has their face dropped on one side?
A – Arms (Tay/Cánh tay): Does one arm feel weak or difficult to move
S – Speech (Nói): Are they slurring their words or difficult to understand
T – Time (Thời gian): If someone is showing any symptoms – call 000.

## Project Aim

We set out to understand stroke awareness in Vietnamese communities across SWS, including:

- Can people recognize stroke symptoms?
- Do they understand risk factors?
- Do they know how to respond during a stroke?

We also tested whether culturally tailored education could improve awareness and encourage people to seek help sooner

## How we worked with the Vietnamese Community

We worked closely with the Vietnamese community from the start. Our diverse team included bilingual health professionals, Vietnamese-speaking students, and a Vietnamese-trained doctor with strong community connections.

We partnered with:

- Vietnamese Community in Australia – NSW Chapter
- The Vietnamese Interagency Workers Group (a network of community service providers)
- South West Sydney Stroke Support Group, Vietnamese stroke survivors and local Vietnamese health literacy groups
- The Stroke Foundation

Just one culturally tailored session significantly improved stroke knowledge in the Vietnamese community.

## What we did

- Developed educational resources on how to recognise and respond if anyone shows stroke symptoms and how to prevent stroke. We had these translated into Vietnamese and ensured they were culturally relevant and appropriate.
- Used trusted voices – we worked with community members who delivered the education in Vietnamese.
- Empowered Vietnamese community members to let us know what they were concerned about – addressing their priorities as well as what we thought was important.
- Collaborating with the Vietnamese Interagency Workers Group, a network of community service providers.
- Engaged with community members at cultural events like Lunar New Year festivals and supporting establishment of a new Stroke Watch group led by the Vietnamese community members.
- We partnered with the Stroke Foundation to share their translated stroke information resources.
- Evaluated the way we worked together – so we could share this with others, and be ready to adapt the things that worked with other multicultural communities.

## What we achieved

Success came from:

- Ongoing reciprocal engagement with local community members and organisations
- Training community members as stroke ambassadors
- Ongoing support from health professionals
- Strong partnerships with the Ingham Institute, UNSW Neurology, SWS Multicultural Health Unit, and Vietnamese community organizations

## What we learned

- Stay flexible – some of the best opportunities arise unexpectedly
- Build genuine relationships with community leaders and members
- Let the community lead for long-term success
- Keep exploring connections – you'll discover valuable networks you didn't know existed
- Letting the community leads enables you to work with trusted community leaders, and build trust, and improve the reach to more community members than you might access through other channels

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