

**Submission  
No 10**

**IMPROVING CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS TO CULTURALLY AND  
LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE COMMUNITIES**

**Organisation:** Local Government Multicultural Network (LGMN)

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**NSW Local Government Multicultural Network - Anti-Racism Working Group  
submission to:**

**NSW Parliament inquiry into Improving crisis communications to culturally  
and linguistically diverse communities**

NSW Local Government Multicultural Network (Network) members embrace the opportunity to provide feedback and comments to the NSW Parliament inquiry. The Network is committed to supporting our diverse cohorts and communities through crises and has worked in collaboration with statewide mainstream departments in reinforcing safety, support and health messaging, particularly through the recent floods as well as the ongoing navigation of the global pandemic.

Within this submission, we have included comments which capture how the NSW Government has to date utilised channels of communication with diverse communities and networks to distribute in-language information. We have also shared recommendations on how to continuously improve engagement and support of diverse communities through a crisis and how, together, we can envision a much more collaborative model that includes the community, all levels of government and key diverse stakeholders serving and supporting our diverse communities.

The Network welcomes the committee's commitment to addressing racism and discrimination related to crisis communications. Many of us were first hand witnesses of the negative impacts the racist communications had on people in the 12 LGAs of Concern. The impacts were identified through NSW Health during the height of the pandemic. As a result of exposure during the first months of the pandemic, the Network established the NSW Anti-Racism Working Group. It became very clear to



us during that time that communications (including governmental communication and mainstream media communications) were and continue to be biased.

The Network endeavours to open up dialogue between all parties working with multicultural communities in the hope for inclusion, belonging and justice for all.

### **Issues identified during the crises:**

- Translation materials were developed very quickly at the beginning of Covid and were not effective in getting the message across regarding health and restrictions due to differing cultural understandings and the use of formalised language formats
- Barriers to attaining support or access to help. Relief packages were set up digitally, which was difficult for diverse communities to access due to poor health literacy and the use of formal and unclear messaging e.g., covid and flood relief packages
- The way the 12 Areas of Concern was managed and communicated highlighted racism and discrimination issues and was detrimental to social cohesion. Seeing such narratives play out in the mainstream media further isolated vulnerable groups and perpetuates harmful stigmas
- Constant Police and Military presence and aggression toward community members in the 12 Areas of Concern was fuelled by racist communication and led to the traumatising and constant fear of many people in these areas
- The Premier initially rejected requests for talks from the 12 Mayors of the LGAs of concern. The Premier did not see it as a priority and this further entrenched the divide between the east and west of Sydney. The Premier met several weeks later in small groups instead. This showcased the limited



collaboration between Local and State Governments, which is still and ongoing issue

- There was no authentic pathway established to provide community representation through advisory committees. Community leaders and representatives felt that, once again, governments handpicked voices and representation and effectively excluded people on the ground from the decision making table
- There was a lack of celebration and recognition of communities who provided amazing support to vulnerable groups. The most common messaging in all communications was a vilification of Western Sydney communities who were doing ‘the wrong thing’

Further issues arising from the former Premier’s actions and comments:

The Premier’s communication style and delivery felt demeaning and ineffective.

Comments expressed in both print and media made by the Premier included:

*‘I don’t think it is OK to visit your cousins or have sleepovers’*

*‘Can I say to the communities in those areas, many have a similar background to me’*

If the Premier was aiming to connect to such communities, she did not achieve this outcome. Many who live and work in Greater Westerns Sydney are holding positions and jobs that are the backbone of our economy and communities: drivers, hospitality workers, deliveries, manufacturer, packers. Many did not have the comforts to be



able to fulfill their roles via Teams or Zoom. Many were also impacted by a digital literacy and access divide.

Such communications from the State government and Health NSW also demonstrated a clear lack of understanding and disrespect of diverse communities who, at times, are primary carers of family and children with special needs, who have religious and cultural practices that involve larger family units or have places of worship that are significant to their practice. This type of communication further demonised and stereotyped people who are already placed in spaces of stigma via the mainstream media.

The restrictions placed enormous financial and emotional strain on families particularly from refugee backgrounds and international students. Lower income earners were left to line up for hours in testing clinics. It caused particular strain when many testing clinics were closed over Christmas and New Years break over Dec 2021 and Jan 2022. Resources were not being directed to areas of higher need.

### **What worked well and suggestions for ongoing enhancements**

- The solidarity between Councils and community in the 12 Areas of Concern demonstrated resilience and amplified representation and accountability
- Language and communications around Covid-19 were initially focused on translations but later moved toward stronger engagement as the community started to take on the forward-facing messages. This is great practice particularly the videos produced by SBS and Multicultural NSW. Many diverse NGOs also produced their own resources, which were very effective



- The use of diverse social media and media by Government departments particularly via Facebook, WeChat, Instagram, mainstream television programs and health updates live in language increased accessibility and inclusion
- The use of social media and content created by diverse communities themselves as they have a deep understanding of their communities
- State Governments seeking support from Local governments. We need an ongoing and long-term commitment to co-designing initiatives and plans moving forward (The Network was very active in information distribution and providing connections to support)
- Creating linkers through different networks who work on building trust and strong relationships so we can work more collaboratively when facing crises
- Creating social media platforms that continue the work of our messaging building on trust and credibility. We need to be co-designing this with diverse communities
- Ongoing funding supporting a crisis management plan with diverse communities
- Language - access to information in different languages, in simple language
- Translator services – a local hotline number
- Multi and bilingual translators nearby and online - with different on call availability 24/7
- SMS and email content in different languages.

Below are some examples of great practices throughout the crisis:

- Health messaging: [Influenza resources in community languages - Influenza \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.nsw.gov.au/influenza-resources)
- These use language visuals that support understanding <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bBobkIly2k&feature=youtu.be>



- The effective use of videos in language and aligning them with events and celebrations e.g. Lunar New Year

### **Recommendations for future crises**

- Telecast emergency alert messages in different community languages
- Do not limit communication to community leaders, not all communities have such a formal structure. Communication with community groups as well as community leaders is crucial
- Send communications through diverse media outlets such as community radio, community newspapers and religious leaders. Include these messages in language too.
- Adequate funding for CALD targeted communication
- Consider the limited literacy of many community members and the need to use both online and offline strategies
- Develop and implement a targeted engagement and recruitment campaign to recruit CALD volunteers in SES and other community organisations
- Employ bi-language staff to develop and implement CALD communication strategies that are culturally and language appropriate (social media, traditional media and relationship building)
- Develop plans and strategies through an anti-racism lens in a culturally and psychologically safe manner
- Provide ongoing cultural awareness and anti-racism training to communications staff in particular but all staff in Health NSW and NSW government as it is evident that the staff in these institutions do not reflect the diverse communities we have in NSW
- Leaderships and staff in government agencies and media outlets must represent the diversity of the community
- Adopt a co- design approach with CALD communities in planning, implementation and evaluation
- Develop strategies to decrease silos between different government departments responsible for different aspects of crisis management
- Fund place-based organisations to be prepared and resourced in the event of a crisis. These local organisations are best placed to respond to crises and



support CALD communities as they have the best relationships and contacts with local CALD communities.

- Build ongoing relationship and trust with community leaders and community groups Develop a database of Communities across NSW and take the time to understand who the best people are to spread the messages
- Consistent application of all health mandates and lockdown restrictions throughout all NSW LGAs

## Conclusion

We have had no shortage of discussions, consultations, policies, strategies, and research on this topic over the years, however, what we really need is a commitment to implement the recommendations and best practice in a consistent and whole of government approach with a clear accountability framework i.e., KPIs and outcome measures, data collection and a link to organisation and leaders' performance reviews.

We need to be better prepared and resourced in advance. With climate change natural disasters are only going to become more commonplace, we need to work together to be prepared and become resilient. We must co-design these plans with CALD communities to ensure plans are culturally aware and sensitive.

Community representation in decision making and leadership level communication, especially in community engagement, marketing and policy is also critical.

The Network endorses the Migration Council of Australia's best practice guide: [\*Integrating culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse communities in rapid responses to public health crises Communication guide – January 2022\*](#). Access document [here](#)