

**Submission
No 20**

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

Organisation: Community Hubs Australia

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Assembly's inquiry into improving crisis communications to culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Community Hubs Australia

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Community Hubs Australia (CHA) is a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving social cohesion by achieving positive settlement outcomes for Australia's newest residents. Our goal is to assist culturally diverse people, regardless of their arrival status (refugee, migrant, temporary visa), to integrate into Australian communities. CHA works in partnership with government, businesses, philanthropy, not-for-profits, and community organisations to fund and facilitate locally generated programs that reduce isolation and increase connection.

CHA delivers a network of community hubs across Australia, to engage with and support women with pre-school children from diverse communities. A community hub is a place-based people-centered program that connects people (mainly women) with schools, with each other and with organisation that offer services such as health, education and settlement support.

Hubs are embedded in primary schools, and harness existing school infrastructure and local community or government services. CHA partners with specialist support agencies to operate community hubs in local government areas in Victoria (41 sites), New South Wales (25 sites), Queensland (21 sites) and South Australia (10 sites).

The NSW community hubs network consists of hubs across Parramatta (2 sites), Cumberland (3 sites), Fairfield (4 sites), Canterbury-Bankstown (7 sites), Blacktown (3 sites), Liverpool (3 sites) and Wollongong (3 sites). In 2022, new hubs will be established in Armidale (3 sites) and Coffs Harbour (2 sites).

1.2 RESPONSE TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

1.2.1 Use of multicultural and CALD community groups and networks to distribute in-language information

Community hubs are a proven and trusted conduit for information for women in multicultural communities. During the COVID-19 crisis in 2021, hubs were pivotal in communicating messages around vaccinations, lockdowns, and mask regulations to their families. Hubs respond to the needs of their community, for some hubs WhatsApp groups were a critical tool in communication and for others it was calling each family on the phone to check-in and answer any questions. Hubs invited health workers in, either on a zoom call or in person, to discuss vaccinations with their community and ensure that they were supported to make an informed decision.

The use of community groups is important in delivering information to CALD communities, especially when the message is delivered through a trusted community leader, or someone of the same culture, religious affiliation, or ethnicity. It would be beneficial to bring community leaders, into the planning and delivery of crisis communications from the beginning and ensure that they have translated resources in a timely manner. It's important to be conscious of the extra work community leaders would be taking on during a crisis to help in distributing communications, and where possible, they should receive supports and compensation. Supporting community leaders to take on

this role in crisis communications can lead to more inclusive and effective messaging, but also help to reduce burnout.

Multicultural groups and networks are a valuable tool in communicating with community, however this should not be the only method of connection. Care must be taken to ensure that those outside of the established community groups are not missing out on critical information.

Schools and community hubs should be considered an important tool in communicating with a variety of community groups and networks, especially families that may be isolated and are not part of an established group. It's important that schools have timely access to in-language information that can then be distributed through students and families, through school-based learning apps or through co-located programs such as community hubs.

To ensure that the message is received and understood, members of diverse communities should be hearing consistent messaging from all sources – including what they might hear from community groups or networks, their school or hub, and organisations they connect with.

1.2.2 Ways to improve channels of communication with CALD communities

A key factor in effective communication with diverse communities is ensuring that all communications are available in-language as soon as possible. Any in-language versions of communications should be distributed at the same time as the English version. This ensures that an effective and accurate translation is available and can reduce the risk of inaccurate translations or misunderstandings within community.

It's important to ensure that the message can be understood by anyone, regardless of whether they are literate in their first language. Communications should use plain and easy to understand language, images or videos, and voice recordings to enable all members of the community to understand.

Collaboration between service providers, schools, community hubs and other local organisations is important for effective communication with community. For example, shared knowledge of which service providers have capacity would make service referrals more effective during a time of crisis. Collaboration is something that the community hubs program excels at, by partnering with local organisations to provide on-the-ground support to the school-based hubs, resources are effectively shared between the education, community, and service spheres.

Sanctions or fines to promote compliance with crisis messaging can cause fear and panic within the community, and often do more harm than good. For example, during the COVID-19 crisis of 2021, there were many barriers to CALD families understanding the messaging and procedure of reporting positive RAT tests. Messages broadcast through news networks of \$1,000 fines for anyone who failed to report their positive test caused significant fear among community members. This impacted families who were struggling to report their tests, unsure of where to go for help and conscious that they could not afford a potential fine.

Promoting accessible English language learning for CALD communities is important to ensure that when crises occur, the community is equipped to respond to them. English language learning not only improves comprehension of critical information, but allows migrants to build connections across cultural groups, and fosters trust and connection within communities. Community hubs provide a space for migrant families, particularly women with dependent children, to access English tuition in a way that suits their needs. For example, offering childminding on-site alongside the English classes has proven to be integral in building language capacity among mothers as they would not be able to attend other traditional forms of English tuition.

The responsive model of the community hubs program meant that almost every hub in NSW utilised different channels of communication during the COVID-19 crisis in 2021. Hubs used online and remote programming to keep connected with their community such as through Zoom playgroup or English class, or through activity packs delivered to their homes. Many hub leaders spent a lot of time calling families for a one-on-one chat, to check in and make sure they were doing okay. When problems arose, hub leaders were often the first port of call for families and connected them into the services and supports they needed - such as emergency housing support, financial support or domestic and family violence services. Trust, and knowledge of their community's needs, allowed hub leaders to effectively connect and communicate with their families during a crisis.

1.2.3 Addressing racism and discrimination related to crisis communications

Increased collaboration and consultation with local community leaders in the planning and executing of crisis communications would assist in combatting racism and discrimination. Representatives from the community should be included early on, as they are best placed to respond and advise on the unique challenges faced by CALD communities.

Consultation would increase awareness of the barriers faced by diverse communities in understanding and responding to crisis communications. These barriers could include their level of literacy, or access to devices and news. Understanding of the barriers can help government to proactively address them in their communications.

Community hubs are responsive to the needs of their community and are well placed to facilitate crisis communications with respect to the individual cultures and backgrounds within the hub. Hubs promote cross-cultural connection and social cohesion in NSW communities, and can help to fight any misinformation and discrimination that can hurt communities in times of crisis.

1.3 CONCLUSION

Community Hubs Australia believes that consistent messaging from a variety of sources will improve communications to CALD communities in times of crisis. Utilising pre-existing networks, such as schools and co-located programs such as community hubs, can help to engage those that may otherwise be missed.

Effective communication to CALD communities is translated and available in a timely manner, and it's simple and easy to understand regardless of the reader's prior learning. Collaboration between community, services providers and the education sector is key to effective communication. Proactive

solutions, like increased English tuition for migrant families, can help address these issues before they arise.

Finally, communication to communities regardless of their background, should be inclusive and respectful. Involving community members in all aspects from planning to execution will ensure that everyone feels included, supported and connected.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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