

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

Organisation: Indian (Sub-Cont) Crisis & Support Agency
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Partially
Confidential

Inquiry into improving crisis communications to CALD communities

Submission

Introduction

The Indian (Sub-Cont) Crisis & Support Agency (ICSA) is the first Non-Government Organisation (NGO) for the Indian Subcontinent and like cultures in Australia. We are a bespoke agency that began by providing support services for Temporary Migrant Residents (TRM) from an Indian Subcontinent heritage which have expanded to the wider community.

ICSA uses evidence-based data and community intelligence to develop services, advocate and offer professional cultural consultancy.

ICSA has validated community intelligence directly from client management, research/information and participation in academic research locally and use of research materials from overseas.

ICSA client services are developed to address the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities living in Australia [or with connections to someone in Australia]. We are confident that if we can resolve issues for this demographic, then it logically applies more widely.

Our services are categorised as:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Client Services. | 4. Specialist Services |
| 2. Professional Development | 5. Community Connections |
| 3. Consultancy | 6. Advocacy |

Client Services

The issues and needs in CALD communities are generally acknowledged to be more complex, multi-faceted and be over-layered with a variety of intersections. Our case work in this space is addressed within the context.

Our growing our expertise of CALD issues and challenges comes directly through grassroots support to clients in demanding circumstances often with underlying vulnerabilities.

We use our community intelligence to offer cultural consultancy, advocate for social justice and speak up for those who cannot.

During COVID-19 lockdown, ICSA ran community information sessions regularly and distributed information within the community by direct targeting of messaging through known and reliable community influencers.

Use Of Multicultural & CALD Community Groups & Networks To Distribute In-Language information.

The use of groups and networks is more effective when

- Groups are readily recognised as genuine, trusted and reliable
- The messaging is consistent with other communications ie news, social media
- Groups that are trusted should be validated and supported for it to be known in the community that they are speaking from a place of [delegated] authority and offering accurate information.
- When using 'community leaders' or faith based leaders care must be taken as to any other agenda at play. Some faiths do not agree with the messaging, that can add complication and confusion. Many community leaders are self-anointed therefore are more likely to present information in a manner that promotes them; which is a conflict of

interest and be open to a beneficial interpretation of the messaging. This is critical in that people share information accurately regardless.

A recognised pathway of how information is passed and communicated would need for the community to recognise the source is trusted. These groups and networks that are used should at least know how systems work and be in a position to talk in an informed manner.

There could be some capacity building for networks that are large to build up their knowledge or organisations that have the skills and knowledge could be linked to known networks.

Ways To Improve Channels Of Communication

Pathways

There are multiple issues in the manner of communication, to illustrate this we need only to look at how the 000 emergency services call out is used. It has become a challenge in how terms are used in everyday life that then get lost in translation.

Language

We are an agency with Crisis in our name, we recognise that people from our demographic will seek us out with that word, without a pure definition of crisis; it is therefore culturally appropriate. As to whether someone is in crisis – we first acknowledge to them it's real and now, but it's our job to triage their issues and come to a mutual understanding of crisis, emergency and urgency vs a wish.

Too often words are used in creative ways that at times lose meaning, therefore we end up with people ringing 000 because they have lost the house keys. We have lost the common notion of what the number is for, it hasn't been reinforced in recent years as it once was.

To improve communication channels we also need to improve the language and its use when it comes to crisis, health and legal matters.

One issue we noted in the Pandemic lockdown was confusion over Government departments; named in a confusing manner. For example, Dept of Communities and Justice is poorly understood, but gives direction or determines very serious issues in people's lives. It was better to have Dept of Justice and Families and Communities – easier to understand.

Other departments are just confusing, this speaks to how well information is understood or consumed as in coming from an authority, or reliable source.

We were sending out messaging from Multicultural NSW, that was related to Health, packaged and interpreted by various groups and languages; not surprising it became confusing as to who people should listen to.

Translations that come out quickly do not have the time to be grounded and tested, it would be good to have a glossary of terms in times of crisis or call out that are tested. Failing that it could be useful to have on a panel people who can be called upon to rest resources after translation to get the best communication out quickly.

Consistency

Communication that is critical must have a *reliable pathway* from the authoritative source to the consumer that people can recognise and get accustomed to.

This means maintaining some form of communication lines out of crisis (perhaps less frequently).

Politics

Keeping politics out is essential if messaging is to be effective.

The large roundtables with ministers open to all, served to get many attendees which may be great for campaigning, but in messaging it became counterproductive.

People sought out to be community leaders so they could be added to the list of attendees and then took videos and zoom screen shots to promote their own importance on social media.

Regrettably some hosts of the forums started to give opportunity to the same few people (they seemed to have an offline rapport with) to be allowed to ask questions and even publicly promoted the attendee, leaving the vast majority of attendees to only be allowed to listen but no chat option to ask questions and

no unmute to ask questions. Moderation is important, but censoring what can be discussed in this way lost faith in the process. It was not helpful nor useful, it led to skilled and knowledgeable people to leave the forums and eventually not attending at all - it became too political.

Such forums need to be done professionally, with an agenda, fair opportunity and not as a means of promoting a 'squeaky wheel' leader or their next event. Questions can be better vetted and ready with answers before such forums to save time or be presented in the form of minutes/summary.

Forums or communications should not be about *who* but *what* supported by substantive knowledge and expertise.

Care should be taken in relying on people with a large social media following, as many followers don't even live in Australia and that muddies the waters when people use their opinions drawn from their social media presence. It should be reasonably acknowledged these days that while social media is powerful form of communication, it is growingly mistrusted due the exposure of false news and use of algorithms.

Addressing Racism & Discrimination Related To Crisis Communications

It was noted that at times it seemed messaging was 'culturally afraid', which seemed to affect the way communications were phrased. There was at times too much effort on not being offensive which led to diluting the message. Sometimes the hard truth needs to be stated in a concise way, dressing it up loses meaning. Which in the end backfired as, when the hard lockdown came it was how groups of people were treated (imprisoned was the view) that created the real message that they were somehow responsible for the spread. Some of the ramifications of those lockdowns are still being felt.

While it is accepted some communities had challenges in getting the distancing & vaccination messages, the bigger picture was they were more likely to be essential workers and therefore moving around and that they couldn't get in to be vaccinated.

Race played a part but the disrespect in being the people keeping the economy moving to be accused of being the spreaders was unacceptable. Discrimination is abundant whether by postcode or by race, when it comes to crisis communication the only way to get it right is to have messaging all the time from Government sources of authority.

Authorisation

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