

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

Organisation: NSW Government

Date Received: 24 June 2022

NSW Government submission to the inquiry on improving crisis communications to culturally and linguistically diverse communities

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY
SERVICES

MULTICULTURAL NSW

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Contents | 2 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Understanding that culturally and linguistically diverse audiences face compounded barriers to communication is critical for effective crisis communication | 4 |
| The people of NSW | 4 |
| Multicultural principles entrench the responsibility of accessible communication | 5 |
| Overview of existing processes for emergency management and crisis communications in NSW ... | 5 |
| A) Use of multicultural and CALD community groups and networks to distribute in-language information | 7 |
| The NSW Government connected with prominent, well established community members and groups to disseminate information quickly and effectively | 7 |
| The NSW Government streamlined governance structures to work more closely with trusted community networks and be more responsive to community calls | 10 |
| Equipping trusted sources with the supports and information to co-ordinate the delivery of information | 12 |
| The NSW Government provides language service supports to ensure vital crisis communications are delivered in-language in an accurate and timely manner | 15 |
| B) Ways to improve channels of communication with CALD communities | 18 |
| Engaging multicultural media as a trusted source to reach broader CALD audience bases | 18 |
| The NSW Government engaged various channels of communication to ensure accessibility to a wider range of audiences | 19 |
| The NSW Government put community at the centre of all communications to understand their needs | 21 |
| The NSW Government worked with community to foster sustainable, local solutions to local issues | 26 |
| The focus on accessibility of information when delivering key government information | 26 |

| | |
|--|----|
| The NSW Government recognised the need to support community networks and leaders to mitigate the risk of experiencing over-consultation and fatigue..... | 35 |
| C) Addressing racism and discrimination related to crisis communications..... | 37 |
| The NSW Government ensures inclusive crisis communication: it is collaborative with communities, across agencies and is sensitive to potential for stigmatisation..... | 38 |
| The NSW Government manages social media and online information channels to prevent posting outside of community guidelines racist or hateful dialogue | 39 |
| The NSW Government has structural mechanisms to identify, monitor, share information and respond to racism and hate incidents during a crisis or emergency | 39 |
| The NSW Government seeks community sentiment insights from a range of sources | 40 |
| The NSW Government worked with communities, responding to concerns of unfair targeting by police in enforcing Public Health Orders | 42 |
| Safeguarding social cohesion workshops built resilience and relieved pandemic fatigue..... | 43 |
| COMPACT Alliance community networks share and learn from community experiences | 44 |
| Conclusion..... | 46 |

Introduction

Understanding that culturally and linguistically diverse audiences face compounded barriers to communication is critical for effective crisis communication

In crisis situations, the provision of information in a language we understand, from a trusted source and at a level we comprehend, is key to successful engagement of audiences. During emergency situations, people from culturally and linguistically diverse ('CALD') backgrounds are at risk of being disproportionately impacted due to language barriers. These cohorts can be placed at greater risk of facing multiple, compounded barriers, based on factors such as age, gender, visa status and other social vulnerabilities.¹

These barriers can adversely impact access to information that is critical to ensuring CALD communities are informed, safe and have the tools to cope with challenges that arise in emergency situations. Key to mitigating these challenges is engaging CALD community groups and networks to ensure the effective dissemination of 'in-language' information during times of crisis. A lack of linguistically accessible communication can impede the ability for CALD communities to access, interpret and act on the advice of Government. In situations of disaster and emergency, stress and panic can further hinder the ability to comprehend and communicate in a language that is not an individual's dominant language.²

It is critical to recognise that communicating to CALD communities during a crisis requires a nuanced understanding of how people receive and understand information in their own language.³ Whether it is in response to bushfires, floods, acts of terrorism or a pandemic, the NSW Government recognises that connected communities are more resilient to, and recover more quickly from, adversity. A whole of society resilience-based approach recognises – and responds to – emergency situations as they evolve working with community on preparedness, prevention, response and recovery.

The people of NSW

NSW has one of the most culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse populations in the country with over 26% of residents born overseas and with 46% of residents having a least one parent born overseas.⁴ In addition, more than 215 languages are spoken and over 144 different religions are practised across our communities.

NSW's population has consistently grown over the last decade, with net overseas migration an historically strong driver of the state's ongoing growth. Between 1981 and 2017 migration accounted

¹ Ogie, R. I. & Pradhan, B. 2019, 'Natural Hazards and Social Vulnerability of Place: The Strength-Based Approach Applied to Wollongong, Australia', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, vol. 10, pp. 404-420.

² Tannenbaum, M. & Har, E. 2020, 'Beyond basic communication: The role of the mother tongue in cognitive-behavioural therapy', *International Journal of Bilingualism*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 881–892.

³ Migration Council Australia. 2022. 'Integration culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse communities in rapid responses to public health crises', viewed 17 June 2022, <<https://migrationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Communication-Guide-CALD-communities-in-public-health-crises.pdf>>.

⁴ Multicultural NSW. 2022. 'NSW Community Profile', viewed 17 June 2022, <<https://multiculturalnsw.id.com.au/>>.

for 53.2% of NSW's net population growth. In 2019 NSW settled over 101,000 persons through various permanent migration streams (including persons on skilled, humanitarian and family visas).

Due to the nuances of cultural diversity, there are significant challenges to effective communications when responding during times of crisis. In this context of NSW's incredibly diverse demographics, the provision of accurate and culturally appropriate Government information is vital to ensuring linguistic accessibility to NSW's multicultural population.

Multicultural principles entrench the responsibility of accessible communication

The *Multicultural Act NSW 2000* outlines the need to respect and make provision for the culture, language and religion of others within an Australian legal and institutional framework, and for all institutions within the State to recognise and promote the linguistic and cultural assets in the population of New South Wales as valuable resources.

As set out in section 3 of the Act, the Multicultural Principles are the policy of the state, mandating each public authority to observe the Principles in conducting its affairs. The Principles lay the foundations for a socially cohesive, inclusive multicultural society.

At the core of both the NSW legislation and policy framework is ensuring fair and equitable access to Government customer service, as outlined in the Multicultural Principles. One of these Principles states that:

'all individuals in NSW should have the greatest possible opportunity to make use of, and participate in, relevant activities and programs provided or administered by the Government of NSW'.⁵

This Principle mandates agencies with a responsibility to deliver accurate, accessible and culturally appropriate information for NSW's highly multicultural population. As supported by the *Premier's Memorandum 2021-04 Language Services Provision in Multicultural NSW*,⁶ this means NSW Government agencies are expected to ensure interpreting services are provided to clients when needed and appropriately translated materials are made available to better support the community.

Overview of existing processes for emergency management and crisis communications in NSW

During a declared emergency, the state implements the NSW State Emergency Management Plan ('**EMPLAN**'),⁷ which provides direction for coordinating public information between agencies in such circumstances. The *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* ('**SERM Act**')⁸ defines an 'emergency' as an event which requires a significant and coordinated response and which endangers health, property or causes a failure or significant disruption to an essential service or infrastructure.

⁵ Section 3(1)(e)(ii) *Multicultural Act NSW 2000*.

⁶ Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2022. *M2021-04 Language Service Provision in Multicultural NSW*, viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://arp.nsw.gov.au/m2021-04-language-services-provision-in-multicultural-nsw>>.

⁷ NSW Government. 2022. *State Emergency Management Plan: EMPLAN*, viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://www.nsw.gov.au/rescue-and-emergency-management/state-emergency-management-plan-emplan>>.

⁸Section 4(1) *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act NSW 1989 No 165*.

This covers situations of natural disasters (such as situations involving fire, flood, storm, earthquake, explosion, terrorist act, accident or warlike action) as well as public health emergencies (such as the COVID-19 pandemic).

The SERM Act governs emergency management arrangements, authorises and requires a State EMPLAN, and establishes the State Emergency Management Committee and the positions of State Emergency Operations Controller ('**SECON**') and State Emergency Recovery Controller ('**SERCON**').

The EMPLAN outlines the NSW approach to emergency management and the roles and responsibilities of different agencies. Under the EMPLAN, sub-plans are maintained for specific hazards (including fires, bushfires, storms and floods) and the support requirements related to them.

The EMPLAN is also supported by the NSW Recovery Plan, which provides a more detailed framework for recovery operations that can be tailored to support the affected community or communities. Emergency Management Committees at State, regional and local levels are responsible for recovery planning. Resilience NSW ('**RNSW**') supports the Minister and SERCON to coordinate formal recovery processes, including recovery operations, at each of these levels.

For communications, the EMPLAN is supported by the Public Information Services Functional Area Supporting Plan. It details arrangements for the Public Information Services Functional Area Coordinator ('**PIFAC**'), a role held by the NSW Police Force, to coordinate and release public information during an actual or imminent emergency. The PIFAC will co-ordinate public information activities of agencies involved to ensure effective communication of information or warnings.

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

In times of crisis, people from CALD backgrounds are more likely to revert to their first language and seek information from trusted sources as it can help individuals make sense of uncertainty and cope with trauma.⁹ This means that people from CALD backgrounds are more likely to rely on in-language information for advice and guidance.

Furthermore, during crisis situations CALD cohorts have been found to prioritise social networks, international linkages and interpersonal communication when seeking information, as opposed to more official government sources and channels of communication. This can be attributed to higher levels of trust in community groups and networks, which often have established reputations within CALD communities.¹⁰ As such, CALD community groups and networks can often act as information intermediaries to reach individuals during emergency situations.¹¹

The NSW Government recognises the strength that CALD groups and networks have in disseminating vital information; there is a long history of collaborative partnership to ensure distribution of in-language information has happened transparently and quickly. This partnership has been more important than ever in recent years, with communities across NSW facing unprecedented challenges in the wake of the 2019 bushfires, flooding, and the COVID-19 pandemic. This collaboration between government and community groups has worked to ensure decision-making, policies and service delivery is responsive to the immediate needs of impacted communities.

While the NSW Government leverages the trust and efficacy of multicultural and CALD community groups in distributing information, agencies also recognise that the success of this relationship is fostered by ensuring these trusted sources are listened to and provided with support in their work to deliver vital and time-sensitive messaging.

As such, this segment will review ways in which during crisis situations, the NSW Government has:

- Recognised, and subsequently utilised, CALD groups to distribute in-language information
- Streamlined governance structures to listen and provide appropriate support to community members and groups, to facilitate their information distribution.

The NSW Government connected with prominent, well established community members and groups to disseminate information quickly and effectively

During a crisis, it is critical that government agencies engage and consult with a broad range of community groups and networks to ensure messaging reaches intended audiences. An example of this

⁹ Tannenbaum, M. & Har, E. 2020, 'Beyond basic communication: The role of the mother tongue in cognitive-behavioural therapy', *International Journal of Bilingualism*, vol. 24, no. 4, pp. 881–892.

¹⁰ Hanson-Easey, S., Bi, P., & Hansen, A. 2015. 'Risk communication planning with culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD): An all-hazards risk communication toolkit for emergency service agencies', DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.15609.90727.

¹¹ Seale, H., Harris-Roxas, B., Abdi, I., Abela, M., Chauhan, A., & Woodland, L. 2022. 'The role of community leaders and other information intermediaries during the COVID-19 pandemic: insights from the multicultural sector in Australia', *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, vol. 9, no. 174.

was throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Department of Customer Service ('DCS') worked with well-established and prominent community groups to distribute critical crisis communications.

The distribution of resources and information included translated COVID-19 communications, such as:

- Toolkits for holding COVID-19 safe religious and holiday gatherings
- Information about COVID-19 self-isolation requirements
- General COVID-19 stakeholder emails and toolkits.

The community groups engaged in the crisis response also distributed this information across their networks. Key organisations, critical to the effective distribution of government information, include but are not limited to:

- Ethnic Communities Council of Australia
- Cumberland Multicultural Community Services
- Muslim Community Radio
- Western Sydney Community Forum
- NSW Jewish Board of Deputies
- Chabad NSW
- United Muslims NSW
- Muslim Women's Association
- United Indian Association
- Australian Egyptian Council Forum
- Maronite Catholic Diocese of Australia
- Vietnamese Women's Association of NSW
- NSW Council for Pacific Communities.

Case Study – NSW Police engaged role models to engage community

To convey messages from trusted and prominent local sources, the NSW Police Force engaged leading community role models and sportspeople to deliver vaccination messages, which ran in line with the state's lockdown compliance operation.

These included former world champion boxer Billy 'the kid' Dib, former Socceroo Craig Foster, Western Sydney Wanderers and Macarthur Bulls football teams. This approach to stakeholder engagement during the crisis demonstrated the value of engaging trusted leaders to reach, support and engage communities in various ways.

The Department of Communities and Justice ('DCJ') utilised Community Liaison Officers ('CLOs') to leverage trusted and familiar faces to disseminate information. During the Delta outbreak, CLOs served as conduits between government and community to identify strategies to improve communication around COVID-19. This focused on the evolving restrictions, vaccination programs and support services. The information was provided in multiple languages, targeting CALD communities, religious and community leaders, young people, international students, community support workers and English language students.

The CLOs carried out significant work in collaboration with other branches of DCJ, including:

- Establishing the South Sudanese and Sudanese Communities COVID-19 Response Task Force: a platform for information sharing, coordination of efforts, collaboration and the development of effective responses on COVID-19 prevention and education.
- Linking community members with relevant government agencies and key non-government organisations to provide essential services such as accommodation for those needing to isolate away from family, mental health services and food delivery.
- Disseminating in-language Covid-19 messaging, including those with information about isolating at home, getting tested, and vaccination.
- Developing and distributing a resource relevant to non-COVID-19 related services, such as domestic violence services and mental health and homelessness services. This was essential as some members in the community were experiencing domestic and family violence and/or homelessness.
- Working with influential young people to develop a campaign targeted at youth, many of whom felt resentment towards the government following harder lockdowns in the LGAs of concern in southwest Sydney.
- Engaging young people online through art and singing competitions and homework assistance.
- Assisting with the distribution of essential food (including culturally appropriate items) to families and individuals in COVID-19 isolations. At times, this involved the CLOs cooking meals and delivering them to those in need.
- Assisting with the conduct of a virtual “door knock” to check on the welfare of community members and link those in need to services.
- Publishing their own vaccination journeys on social media to encourage the community to vaccinate, and making and posting videos online about the importance of vaccination to protect family and the community.

The NSW Government engaged specific community leaders when trying to reach certain cohorts

When trying to reach a certain group for a specific outcome during the Delta strain of COVID-19 outbreak, the NSW Government engaged targeted community leaders and ambassadors. This worked well when delivering vital health information and other COVID-19 messaging, such as the benefits and importance of getting vaccinated.

For example, NSW Health worked alongside prominent community ambassadors in the healthcare space such as healthcare workers, GPs and elders. These trusted and respected members of the community were empowered to be the source of new information. Working with community leaders increased the effectiveness in delivering important COVID-19 messaging to community, with identified leaders in the healthcare space engaged to facilitate the delivery of health advice and communications. This enabled government messaging from politicians and the NSW Government to be complemented by trusted figures in the healthcare space.

Engaging certain community leaders for specific and targeted purposes worked well during the COVID-19 pandemic period where vaccine hesitancy was high. Community and religious leaders responded with great enthusiasm and responsiveness to a call from NSW Health and Multicultural NSW (**‘MNSW’**) to feature in social media video messages encouraging their communities, in their own languages, to get vaccinated and allaying community concerns about vaccine safety.

As early as May 2021, senior community leaders and heads of religious institutions from a broad spectrum of faiths stood alongside the Premier, Minister for Health and Minister for Multiculturalism

at the Homebush Vaccination Centre to receive their first dose and encourage their communities and congregations to do the same.

Case study – Engaging religious leaders for pop-up vaccination spots in trusted community settings

Getting the vaccination message out was critical but there was also a need to make vaccines more accessible to local communities in places that were culturally safe and familiar. Religious and community leaders were incredibly generous in offering up their places of worship and community centres to NSW Health to establish vaccination pop-up hubs. This unique collaboration between NSW Health and local cultural and religious communities was very well received by communities. Vaccine pop-up hubs subsequently became a key strategy in the vaccination roll-out in NSW.

Vaccination pop-up clinics provided familiar and accessible ways for communities to get the jab. For example, the NSW Government worked alongside religious and community leaders to support a pop-up clinic at Green Valley Mosque that vaccinated 839 people in one day.

Mr Mohammed Yasin, President of the Muslim League of NSW and the operator of Green Valley Mosque and Islamic College, spoke about the unique collaboration that made the clinic a success.

The NSW Government streamlined governance structures to work more closely with trusted community networks and be more responsive to community calls

In response to growing community concerns about the COVID-19 Delta Outbreak, the NSW Government established a more streamlined, responsive governance structure and work program that facilitated cross-government collaboration and provided targeted supports to communities in South-West and Western Sydney.

This streamlined governance structure took shape in the form of the Delta Micro Strategy, which was the NSW Government's multi-faceted response to the Delta strain of COVID-19. Various pillars were established under the Delta Micro Strategy, each created for a specific focus. Pillar 5 was created to focus on empowering community groups to deliver local services and support during the pandemic. Within this pillar, a specific unit was created to work on mitigating risks to CALD communities.

The streamlined structure of the micro strategy allowed the NSW Government to work closely with community leaders and non-government organisations to deliver crisis communications aimed at promoting awareness about Public Health Orders ('PHOs'), government restrictions and access to cross-sector supports.

This approach to emergency management enabled agencies to:

- Test and monitor the effectiveness of their responses in real-time
- Provide needed supports to community members and groups to ensure they were equipped to continue disseminating vital information.

These outcomes were essential to ensuring the crisis response remained relevant and adaptable to challenges that may arise in times of great uncertainty and as crises evolve.

The NSW Government worked with community to collect and analyse sentiment to respond directly to community's lived experience

NSW experienced some of the most stringent public health measures in response to the Delta COVID-19 outbreak, including lockdowns and strict regulatory mandates of various PHOs that were constantly amended. The proliferation of high Delta COVID-19 infection rates was of particular concern in certain Local Government Areas ('LGAs') that fell within South-West and Western Sydney, who experienced some of the harshest impacts of the outbreak. Understandably, this led to communities in these areas feeling significant concern.

In response to this heightened level of concern, MNSW utilised the Pillar 5 structure to establish a community sentiment analysis project to gain a better understanding of the direct impact on communities. The project sought to understand the effectiveness of NSW Government messaging, especially with communities in the LGAs of concern. This was vital given the demographics of communities within the areas of concern, identified as highly diverse, with large cohorts of no-English speaking, or low-English speaking proficiency residents.

The community sentiment project involved conducting regular, in-depth, qualitative interviews with over 250 community leaders in 12 LGAs of concern, gathering feedback from more than 700 interviews in order to deeply understand emerging issues and enable prompt action. These interviews were led by MNSW community engagement staff members and supported by surge capacity staff made up of employees from across the NSW Public sector who responded to calls to support MNSW in this important project. One-on-one interviews digitally conducted by officers with community leaders would take between 30-60 minutes, with many leaders agreeing to confidentially participate on a weekly basis to assist MNSW in tracking and analysing any changes in community sentiment over the course of COVID-19.

Community sentiments recorded from the interviews were coded, analysed and presented to senior NSW agency officials of the Delta micro strategy twice a week, with critical insights provided daily when required. The findings from the interviews provided context and direct insight into community sentiment and experiences of the pandemic, ensuring the NSW Government's COVID-19 relief efforts were responding to emergency needs as informed by grassroots multicultural insights.

As a result of the information gained through the analysis of community sentiment, MNSW was able to work with other agencies and leaders to empower communities to deliver vital messaging. Additionally, the community sentiment project was another avenue for the NSW Government to connect with trusted leaders, by providing updated information that the leaders could disseminate amongst their respective community.

Case Study – COVID-19 Delta Outbreak Community Sentiment Project

During the COVID-19 delta lockdowns, community leaders played a critical role in communicating key messages about public health orders, supporting wellbeing, and retaining community connectedness.

The shift to digital technology presented a challenge in terms of physical interaction and support, but leaders adapted to the use of technology and developed innovative approaches to engaging their constituents in times of crises.

As captured by MNSW's Community Sentiment Project, in response to the challenges one leader conducted virtual 'door knocks' to engage members of their community, assess wellbeing and communicate messages about the public health orders and restrictions. The leader noted that this work was critical to building resilience through meaningful connection and ensuring communities understood the gravity of the COVID-19 Delta outbreak in NSW.

Equipping trusted sources with the supports and information to co-ordinate the delivery of information

With respect to the understanding that communities often turn to certain trusted sources during times of crises, the NSW Government also recognised the importance of supporting trusted community groups with access to updated content and communication strategies empowering them to facilitate accurate information sharing. DCJ provided support to government and non-government organisations with the development of communication processes and functions, including:

- Supporting the Islamic Council of NSW to help design and facilitate a community forum with close to 100 community members, creating channels to help bring their community together and capturing experiences, learnings, and impacts of lockdowns.
- Working with the Cumberland Local Government to build a communication process and templates to triage and deliver messages to audiences during the South-West and Western Sydney lockdown more effectively.
- Supporting the Anatolian Community Services groups to help them better engage with mothers in their community who were left isolated when face-to-face meetings were not possible.
- Collaborating with the Western Sydney Arts Alliance (comprising over 30 councils, arts and culture organisations from across the region) to establish processes and content that were to encourage people around Sydney to connect with art experiences and community members.

Case study – Together Against COVID campaign

In March 2020, DCJ quickly activated a crisis communication response to support their stakeholders, including CALD and vulnerable communities.

The Together Against COVID campaign focused on generating quick-to-activate content delivered through both government channels and stakeholders.

This included specific content to support issues exacerbated by COVID-19 and lockdowns, such as domestic violence, racism and child protection. Content was aimed to support CALD communities, vulnerable young and older people and Indigenous audiences.

Content was translated into 10 different languages that were created and distributed in the first two weeks of lockdown. This totalled 225 pieces of translated content including in languages such as Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, English, Filipino, Greek, Hindi, Punjabi, Italian, Spanish and Vietnamese. A video created from community-curated material highlighted how the diverse communities of NSW came together over the period.

Religious and community leaders were engaged and supplied with tailored communication toolkits to help them simply and quickly amplify these messages to their audiences.

As the COVID-19 crisis continued, DCJ's Office of Community Safety and Cohesion sought to build capability among local and grassroots CALD groups so that they would be better able to communicate effectively with their communities.

The NSW Government held community forums to ensure entrusted CALD groups and networks were supported in their vital role in disseminating information

In recognition of the key role played by CALD groups and networks in distributing vital health information during the various outbreaks of COVID-19, the NSW Government hosted various forms of community engagement opportunities. These approaches sought to provide community leaders and groups with consistent opportunities to engage with NSW Government authorities and experts, ask questions to clarify health advice and be provided with access to real-time updates and discourse around information wherever necessary.

The community engagement forums embedded structured support and opportunities for CALD groups and networks to obtain accurate and timely content regarding the unfolding emergency situations. A Q&A session was included in every forum to allow the community to ask questions directly to representatives from Health, Police, Education, Customer Service and the Small Business Commission as well as directly to the Premier, Minister for Multiculturalism and various other Ministers. Topics often included specifics around social distancing and mask-wearing and details of evolving PHOs which affected religious worship and schooling. MNSW led these forums from March 2020 and they have continued to date in June 2022.

Case study – Multicultural NSW led community engagement forums to support leaders of communities

MNSW supported trusted community sources through various community forums that were facilitated to equip community and religious leaders across NSW with updated information as the pandemic evolved.

The forums were an opportunity for the community to connect with the Minister and various other government agencies on current public health advice, the rules around compliance and COVID-19 restrictions, services, and resources available to the community. The forums were also a platform for community and religious leaders to ask questions, seek guidance and clarify any misinformation.

MNSW maintained its online COVID engagement program throughout 2020 and 2021, even after the first wave of the pandemic had passed. When the Delta wave of COVID-19 hit Sydney in June 2021, MNSW was ready to ramp up the scale and frequency of its online community engagement in response to the rapidly emerging crisis.

In 2021 this involved more than 110 online engagement forums with regional networks, multi-faith religious leaders, peak multicultural bodies, community groups, the humanitarian and settlement sector, and local councils all impacted by the Delta wave. These forums were highly valued by community leaders, with forums often attracting 150 to 350 people, with some reaching as high as 600 participants at the height of the Delta wave. Combined, these forums involved more than 6,830 individual engagements.

As of the publication of this submission, 49 community and religious leader forums with a combined 5,136 attendees were hosted with the Minister for Multiculturalism in frequent attendance. Although currently COVID-19 is no longer the core focus, the forums continue to be utilised to sustain direct pipelines to inform government responses surrounding matter pertinent to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The NSW Police Force had the difficult job of enforcing the PHOs in an ever-evolving environment. NSW Police Force Multicultural Liaison Officers interacted and engaged with communities on a regular basis to help understanding of compliance, educate communities and hear directly from the public on how enforcement of PHOs were impacting them. This information was coordinated by Police Area Commanders and reported through Assistant Commissioner Cooke APM to different stakeholders across Government. One specific example of this is the work of The Grand Mufti of Australia and New Zealand in providing community sentiment on specific needs of his community in relation to Police compliance operations during western Sydney Delta wave lockdowns. Virtual meetings with State and Federal politicians and Arab community leaders were held to address concerns over these compliance operations. The Police Commissioner's message on QR codes, check-in compliance and a Defence Force support operation were translated into ten languages to assist the community.

The NSW Advocate for Children and Young People ('ACYP'), who has a legislative mandate to work with individuals 0-24 years of age¹², held community forums to bring young people together and hear directly from them in their own voice. These forums provided an opportunity to ask questions directly to key decision makers on a range of topics and central to this was the relationship with the NSW Department of Education ('DoE') who participated in Q&A sessions facilitated by ACYP. Recognising and responding to the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child during a crisis is fundamental to the work of ACYP and the NSW Government's broader crisis response.

DCS similarly ensured that their distribution of information across community groups and networks was complemented with community engagement forums, in the form of delivering in-language

¹² Section 3(1) *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 (NSW)*.

COVID-19 information sessions with local groups such as the Chinese Australian Services Society, Assyrian Resource Centre and Metro Assist.

The sessions were conducted in collaboration with the South-West Local Health District and provided an opportunity for members across CALD communities to engage with Government services, ask questions and receive important information from health professionals about the status of the emergency in their community. To initiate engagement with these community groups, DCS collaborated with Service NSW, NSW Health, and Federal Government to leverage institutional and local networks.

In a similar approach, RNSW held community forums following recovery operations of the 2022 floods. These forums invited local leaders in order to ensure voices of the community were heard by the NSW Government. The frequent briefings with local members and councils enabled prompt availability of new information, empowered leaders in supporting their communities through recovery, and provided a forum for feedback and insights to inform recovery programs.

The NSW Government provides language service supports to ensure vital crisis communications are delivered in-language in an accurate and timely manner

As previously noted and mandated by the Premier's Memorandum,¹³ it is a core expectation of the Multicultural Principles¹⁴ that NSW Government agencies ensure all communities have equal access to information regardless of linguistic background. The use of qualified interpreters and translators is key to ensuring linguistic accessibility to crisis communications and disseminating critical information.

This was demonstrated during the COVID-19 lockdowns between 2020 and 2021, when MNSW provided language services support by way of translators and interpreters. This service played a vital role in the public health response to COVID-19 and ensuring equitable access to critical information about the unfolding crisis. Additionally, the use of information obtained through communications with community leaders and community sentiment analysis enabled MNSW and other government agencies to identify gaps in language support, including issues with translations and the availability of information in minority languages. This mechanism was integral to engaging harder to reach cohorts such as members from newly settled communities or people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, who were often engaged with via community leaders themselves and by in-language written and audio translations.

¹³ Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2022. *M2021-04 Language Services Provision in Multicultural NSW*, viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://arp.nsw.gov.au/m2021-04-language-services-provision-in-multicultural-nsw>>.

¹⁴ Section 3(1)(e) *Multicultural NSW Act 2000 (NSW)*.

Case Study – Multicultural NSW and Translation Services

MNSW Language Services played a critical role in supporting the NSW Government's Crisis response in relation to the accessibility of information for CALD communities.

During the COVID-19 Delta outbreak the agency engaged certified NAATI translators and Recognised Practitioners to undertake 2,224 assignments for COVID-19 translations into 61 different languages between 16 June 2021 to 19 November 2021.

The accredited translators also supported the NSW Government's 'Help Us Save Lives' advertising campaign, translating information and related content into 12 different languages. Additionally, MNSW Language Services were responsible for the review of media releases from government agencies and preparing translations for community feedback.

To ensure advice was clear and timely for school principals, staff, students, families and their communities while the COVID-19 safety measures were frequently changing, DoE took charge in delivering in-language information in alignment to the updates in COVID-19 safety measures. This was done over the course of 2020, 2021 and 2022 for various strains of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case Study – In-language support to deliver timely and accurate information for schools

To ensure school communities (including principals, staff, students and their families) were kept informed to constantly changing COVID-19 safety measures, DoE translated relevant and key messaging.

With any change to COVID-related requirements in school settings, DoE developed a high-level summary document outlining the changes. This was translated into up to 36 NSW community languages and made available on DoE's website for schools to use and share as appropriate.

DoE also provided translated proforma letters for schools to use to communicate school closures and re-openings due to the presence of COVID-19 in their communities.

Information about the distribution, timing of use and application of RAT kits was translated into 32 languages and links to online instructional videos and manufacturers guidelines were provided as well as the telephone translation service.

To support CALD communities during lockdowns, translated information was provided about learning from home. This information included how parents could support their children's wellbeing while in lockdown and also on their return to face-to-face learning. Videos were also produced in different languages such as Kurdish Kurmanji for the population in the Armidale region and shared on social media to cater to those with lower literacy.

Another critical mechanism in the delivery of language supports to CALD communities was the use of CLOs in frontline services, such as NSW Health Workers and Police Community Liaison Officers who are usually 'bi-cultural' and 'bilingual'. These liaison officers are an integral part of any crisis communications strategy, as they often act as intermediaries between frontline professionals and the public, building trust with communities, delivering information in culturally appropriate ways, mediating conflict, and arranging additional in-language supports where necessary. These activities are incredibly important in relation to the delivery of crisis communications and promoting the rights of individuals, particularly in exceptionally challenging circumstances.

Case Study – The vital role played by language service professionals during the COVID-19 pandemic

Recognising the growing need of translated materials of vital government health messaging, 83-year-old language service professional Philimon Darmo provided translating support to the NSW Government, working up to 12-hour days during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inspired by his passion to help others and serve his community, Mr Darmo translated key public health messages from English to Assyrian, ranging from changing restrictions to announcements of new exposure sites.

Mr Darmo worked as one of MNSW's language services professionals, from a staff load of more than 800 translators and interpreters.

Meet the man with 30 dictionaries translating COVID-19 public health messaging



By Laura Chung
August 18, 2021 – 11:36am

Save

Share

A A A

2

Philimon Darmo's Camden home is filled with hundreds of Assyrian, English and Arabic books. Among them are more than 30 bilingual dictionaries, which he draws on when translating COVID-19 public health messaging.

The 83-year-old began translating public health messaging from English to Assyrian for the NSW government last year and said he has never been busier.



Philimon Darmo is translating COVID-19 public health messaging from English to Assyrian for his community.
JAMES BRICKWOOD

¹⁵ Chung, L. 2021. 'Meet the man with 30 dictionaries translating, COVID-19 public health messaging', *Sydney Morning Herald*, viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/meet-the-man-with-30-dictionaries-translating-covid-19-public-health-messaging-20210817-p58jkd.html>>.

B) Ways to improve channels of communication with CALD communities

In the last few years, the state of NSW has faced an unprecedented amount of crisis situations that has brought the importance of accessible communication channels with CALD communities to the forefront of government action. Most notably, the outbreak of the Delta variant of COVID-19 presented some of the most significant challenges for the State, requiring a streamlined, cross-collaborative and responsive government structure.

The NSW Government implemented various whole-of-government response mechanisms and approaches during the various waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure:

- Communications were being delivered in pathways communities preferred
- Communications were tailored to communities
- Information was being delivered in an accessible manner that was easily received
- Mitigation of communities feeling over-consulted or fatigued.

As such, this segment will provide an overview of the methods in which the NSW Government delivered communication with CALD communities to draw upon key learnings and approaches to consider for future preparedness in situations of crises.

Engaging multicultural media as a trusted source to reach broader CALD audience bases

The multicultural media sector holds a significant role in supporting dissemination of key Government information to CALD communities, most recently demonstrated in the sharing of community information around COVID-19. The NSW Government continued to engage with the multicultural media sector to ensure public information messages were reaching diverse audiences and communities with low-English literacy levels during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The South-West and Western Sydney communities expressed feelings of confusion around the quickly changing nature of PHOs, captured through MNSW's sentiment analysis. In response, the NSW Government established a media partnership with SBS, a trusted media organisation for many CALD communities. This ensured instant and accurate updates were being delivered to these communities. For instance, live interpreting of the 11am press conferences were conducted in 10 languages. These live-interpreted conferences achieved over 2 million views, with approximately 31,000 viewers daily during the period of 16th June 2021 to 19th November 2021. The high engagement demonstrated the communities' responsiveness to dissemination of information as soon as it was announced through a trusted platform and from the source of truth.

More established multicultural media outlets also offered the ability to reach older demographics that are more vulnerable to the effects of COVID. The multicultural media sector has been an important tool in disseminating NSW-specific information to diverse audiences that may be more likely to consume information from abroad.

During the Delta strain of COVID-19, in response to the significant impact on the multicultural media sector due to loss of advertising revenue, the NSW Government provided financial support by establishing a Multicultural Media Grants Program, delivered by MNSW. To date, MNSW has delivered \$2 million through the Multicultural Media Grant Program, with grants of up to \$50,000 to

multicultural media organisations to support media outlets and ensure the sustainability of the multicultural media sector.

The NSW Government engaged various channels of communication to ensure accessibility to a wider range of audiences

When delivering key government information, it is critical to engage a variety of communication channels and platforms to ensure wide reach and increased points of accessibility. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, NSW Government agencies have worked closely together in coordinated manner on crisis communications to deliver in-language messages as quickly as possible, and through channels of communications preferred by target audiences.

During the Delta strain of COVID-19 outbreak period, a whole-of-government advertising campaign was targeted to multicultural communities across print, radio, digital and social. Communication toolkits were provided to stakeholders for easy reference to resources and a vaccine glossary of terms. This advertising campaign to multicultural communities delivered messages on health advice and financial support across 22 community languages.

Weekly multicultural media briefings provided a regular platform for engagement that helped to build trust with the media. Strategic communications support and media partnerships provided the reach and capability to execute fast communication solutions. This included:

- A partnership with SBS live-interpreted the Premier's 11AM COVID-19 press conferences into 10 languages during the height of the pandemic. More than 2 million people were reached with more than 30,000 average daily views.
- Interviews by Health professionals with leading Arabic-language Radio 2Moro providing the latest health information.
- The NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service ('MHCS') used several social media channels to effectively and consistently deliver accurate, timely and relevant information to CALD groups across NSW (including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube).

To ensure broad reach to a diverse range of audience groups, non-traditional communication approaches were also used, including:

- 246,000 translated flyers sharing public health messages and information about financial support were distributed with food hampers to vulnerable families.
- Videos with community and religious leaders promoting NSW Health messages were shared widely across social media.
- Flyers were distributed through sweet shops for events such as Diwali to encourage COVID safe gatherings.

A number of direct communication approaches were taken to encourage dissemination of key COVID-19 related information, including the following approaches:

- Posters, flyers, factsheets shared directly with other agencies for their dissemination to CALD communities.
- Stakeholder and community engagement via email, including translated COVID messages and communication resources (videos, social media tiles, audio files) to more than 200 CALD

community and stakeholder groups encouraging them to share them through their own networks, channels and communities.

- Communications provided through the NSW Government social media channels (such as www.nsw.gov.au and the Service NSW Facebook page).
- Service NSW provided critical services and information to communities during crisis for CALD communities in service centres, including availability of the Translation Interpreter Service ('TIS') at any of the over 100 locations across NSW.

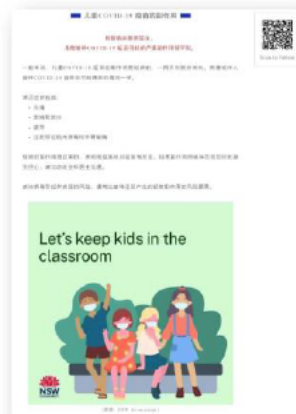
The NSW Government's multi-channel approach to communication was supported by results in qualitative research with Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese speakers, which found that a multi-faceted communications approach contributed to where people heard, viewed and read information. This included communication ranging from TV advertising (45%), press conferences (387%), to information shared by religious (3%) and community leaders (3%).

Following the learnings during the Delta strain of the COVID-19 pandemic, DCS ensured a multi-channelled approach to provide messaging to communities in response to COVID-19 priorities, including:

- A partnership with Nan Hai Culture and Media that produced long form content, including videos with community members and WeChat articles.
- In-language chalk stencils printed on pavements near GP's and pharmacies, encouraged people to get vaccinated.

Case Study – Partnership with Nan Hai to produce in-language content

- 5-11 years vaccination and booster [article](#) via Nan Hai (media partnership targeting Chinese communities)



- Information about vaccine and booster
- Benefits of getting a booster
- Where you can get vaccinated
- Why children should get vaccinated
- Addressing concerns about side-effects
- Reducing the spread of COVID-19

In the context of keeping school communities informed of updated information in educational settings during constantly changing safety measures of various COVID-19 outbreaks, DoE used a variety of communication channels to deliver messaging. This included updating web content for internal and external audiences and providing principals with a communication toolkit. The toolkit included communication resources with the key messages and suggested social media posts to assist principals in informing their communities of any changes. The toolkit also included translated information to

facilitate effective communication with parents, carers and community members with limited English language proficiency and literacy.

In addition, DoE linked to translated COVID-19 fact sheets and social media posts published by the NSW Government, NSW Health, SBS and the Australian Government Health to enable schools to easily share the information with their communities as appropriate.

Upon reflection of the varied communication pathways taken by the NSW Government during COVID-19, a key learning indicates a need to ensure a multi-faceted, multi-channelled communications approach is imperative to reaching audiences during situations where messaging is time sensitive. This allows audiences to receive up-to-date information in a medium they are comfortable with and prefer.

The NSW Government put community at the centre of all communications to understand their needs

The NSW Government undertook a process of discovery during the various outbreaks of the COVID-19 pandemic to put community at the centre of communication planning and strategies. This assisted agencies to ensure public health messaging was developed appropriately and deliberately for the intended audience.

Recognising that communities are not homogenous is essential to effective and inclusive communications

The cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity is one of NSW's greatest social assets. To protect NSW's rich multiculturalism is to recognise and protect the freedom of individuals and communities to practice and maintain their cultural, linguistic, and religious traditions. This is achieved by understanding that multicultural communities are steeped in diversity not limited to language, faith, cultural values and geography. The assumption that a single individual or organisation represents their entire community can risk isolating members of the community.

When planning, developing and implementing a communications strategy, it is important not to apply a homogenous lens in order to respect diversity of communities. This can be achieved through consideration of factors outside of what basic demographic data may present, to ensure greater efficacy of communications, particularly in a crisis environment.

Factors that can delineate individuals from each other, despite coming from the same community, include things such as:

- Language and dialects
- Geographical location
- Preferred communication channels
- English proficiency
- Engagement and trust in government information
- Preferred language spoken at home
- An individual's particular settlement journey
- Current or historic trauma.

Any number of these elements may impact on individuals and their responsiveness to messaging.

The NSW Government recognised the need for robust and holistic planning before communications are rolled out, to tailor communications to the nuances of each community. DCS uses a range of data source and customer sentiment information to understand the needs of the community, continuously monitoring their responses to inform communications. In this planning, the needs and profile of specific communities are considered, including language and dialects.

Another example of how the NSW Government continuously monitored and responded to specific needs of communities was in the earlier stages of the COVID-19 crisis. Community sentiment recorded and analysed by MNSW, referenced earlier in this submission, indicated that some community groups felt key information around changing restrictions and PHOs were available in more common languages but their specific dialects were not represented.

In response, a COVID-19 specific translation fund was established within MNSW to streamline translation and interpreting of key COVID-19 related information. This specific fund was created to support a more holistic and inclusive approach to delivering critical COVID-19 communications, in efforts of reaching all members of communities at the same time, regardless of linguistic background.

As a result of this specific funding, during the period of COVID-19 from March 2020 to December 2021, MNSW conducted:

- Over 32,000 face-to-face interpreting assignments in 123 different languages/dialects.
- Over 22,800 interpreting assignments in 92 languages and dialects by interpreters who hold National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters ('NAATI') credentials.
- Live interpreting in 10 languages in partnership with SBS (Arabic, Assyrian, Bangla, Cantonese, Greek, Khmer, Mandarin, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese) for COVID-19 press conferences with a total reach of over two million viewers in total.
- Commissioned a small pool of Dari speaking interpreters to be ready to welcome new refugees from Afghanistan due to the recent humanitarian crisis.

The COVID-19 specific translation fund enabled MNSW to provide in-language resources to communities in a timely manner, during a period where accurate and quick messaging was critical to the safety of the state. Having the availability of this specific funding for language services removed any concerns of financial coverage, resulting in a more rapid delivery of translation and interpreting services, which ultimately serviced to ensure accessibility of vital resources for all.

Another essential factor that the NSW Government considered in respect of the nuances of each community in its COVID-19 response was geographical location. The NSW Government recognised that although there were certain areas across NSW that hold higher populations of CALD communities, not all communities settle in the same locations.

For instance, certain new and emerging communities have been assisted to settle in rural and remote areas of NSW where historically, the demographics have not been as culturally or linguistically diverse. It is incumbent upon agencies to ensure communications are inclusive and accessible, regardless of geographical location. In the most recent COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW Government activated regional networks to ensure all communities of the area were supported.

Case study – Responsiveness to new and emerging communities in regional NSW

A cluster of COVID-19 cases among a small refugee community in Albury prompted an urgent response from NSW Health. In response, a local network of refugee advocates, settlement services and MNSW Murray-Darling Regional Advisory Council members activated to support NSW Health to deliver health messaging and support to the community.

Responding to increasing case numbers in Newcastle and the Hunter, a local network of multicultural and refugee support services, with dedicated support from NSW Health and NSW Police, ran a weekly crisis meeting to ensure refugee and migrant communities in the region had access to timely and accurate information.

There is a need for direct and targeted communications for cohorts to encourage specific action

Direct and targeted communications is vital to ensure strong and specific uptake of messaging, especially during crisis situations. The provision of tailored messaging is especially important when trying to encourage specific behaviours.

This was of key concern during the various waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, where the NSW Government engaged in various tailored communication campaigns to motivate the community to undertake behaviours that would keep them safe.

This was of particular focus for NSW Health, who deployed various targeted communications in efforts to encourage vaccination uptakes during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. NSW Health ensured ongoing and tailored communications with community groups hardest hit by COVID-19 in the state.

For example, NSW Health focused on creating bespoke resources for Pasifika communities in NSW, as this community had some of the highest cases and hospitalisations due to low vaccination rates. The resources included the COVID-19 Hope Toolkit, designed to address the specific needs of Pasifika communities.

In response to low compliance with COVID-19 related PHOs in certain areas with CALD demographics, NSW Health developed a suite of in-language communications in collaboration with the NSW MHCS and the Western Sydney Translations Service. As a result, daily COVID-19 key messages were delivered in print and audio recordings in multiple languages. They were also made available on the NSW MHCS website.

NSW Health also produced the '*Steps for Contact Tracing*' video and fact sheet in 14 languages to raise awareness about the importance of contact tracing. This included in-language media interviews with SBS Radio in up to 18 languages and bespoke NEMBC in language community radio explainer audio clips, focusing on unpacking COVID-19 updates such as vaccination and COVID safe behaviours.

DCS also recognised the importance of targeted and direct message when delivering vital, time-sensitive information. To encourage rapid delivery of this information during COVID-19, DCS leveraged partnerships during COVID-19 to ensure emails reach the specific cohort they endeavoured to engage. These partnerships included NSW Health, MNSW and other agencies to deliver targeted emails to community stakeholders including multicultural networks, councils, peak bodies, industry groups, Aboriginal and community groups, government agencies and non-for-profit organisations as well as NSW members of parliament for distribution in their communities.

These emails provided up-to-date information, in-language resources, and communications materials for these stakeholders to easily access and distribute amongst their communities. To this day, these databases are constantly growing as collaboration continues and click through and download rates are monitored.

DCJ similarly provided targeted communications, publishing a coronavirus website, hosting appropriate plain English information on key services. It included resources for CALD and multicultural audiences and links to in-language community leader messages produced by MNSW.

Case study – Resilience NSW and Multicultural NSW leveraged food packages to deliver information

Food relief during COVID-19 and the Delta lockdowns was available in NSW for people who were experiencing hardship and did not have the means to obtain their own groceries. Food relief was also available for people who had been directed to self-isolate by NSW Health and did not have the means to obtain their own groceries during the period of isolation. Resilience NSW, through the South-West Sydney Regional Emergency Management Committee chaired a Welfare Subcommittee and one of the key pieces of community feedback was the need for culturally sensitive food hampers. This subcommittee featured community leaders and representation from key community groups to advise on ways food relief could be diversified, become more culturally appropriate and meet growing demand. As a result, culturally appropriate options were created in partnership with Foodbank and Oz Harvest.

When each package went out, important COVID safety information was translated into up to 10 languages and inserted into the hampers to increase awareness and avenues to seek further support.

Enabling community leaders to guide decisions to local problems

Integrating community networks and leaders into decision-making processes can foster two-way dialogues. In the context of crises, it is vital CALD communities be provided opportunity to influence messaging at every stage of a public health crisis.¹⁶ For this to be effective, mechanisms for feedback, revision and collaboration must be included in the preparation, response, and evaluation of messaging. This is crucial in mitigating the risk of misinterpreting the critical needs of vulnerable communities.

¹⁶ Migration Council. 2022. *Integrating culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse communities in rapid responses to public health crises*, viewed 20 June 2022, < <https://migrationcouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Communication-Guide-CALD-communities-in-public-health-crises.pdf>>.

It is also important to recognise that community networks and leaders can provide insight into cultural resilience and the mechanisms CALD communities deploy in times of crisis.¹⁷ That is, their rich understanding of their communities and their needs can be utilised to inform localised and effective solutions.

The NSW Government worked closely with community leaders during the COVID-19 Delta Outbreak, placing the needs of community in the centre of decision-making to deliver effective support. This ensured critical questions, needs and supports were heard by government decision makers and prioritised appropriately.

Case study – Resilience NSW used multiple channels of community feedback to drive next steps of the 2022 flood recovery program

Following the 2022 flood events in northern NSW, RNSW coordinated outreach surveys and ongoing community engagement to gain real insight into how people are tracking on their recovery.

This included data collection and needs assessments throughout the recent floods to guide next steps. RNSW also evaluates the impact of support programs to ensure they effectively bolster community recovery.

This data has allowed RNSW to implement improvements over the last two years to ensure continued support for people's recovery process.

Changes include:

- New bespoke Recovery Support Services that provide immediate support after a major emergency to members of the community that are most in need
- Focus on mental health support and further well-being programs
- A new partnership with Service NSW to improve how people can access support after a major disaster, including new services in recovery centres and community outreach programs, appointment services, improved data collection and grant administration
- Extension of project delivery timeframes for bushfire recovery from June 2022 to June 2023, and extended deadlines for applications for major grants programs in response to community feedback
- New programs to target issues raised by Councils and the community including Aboriginal lands clean up, green waste disposal, fence recycling, illegal dumping, and landfill requirements

Another example involves ACYP who found in their broader disaster work as well as throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, young people have highlighted their desire to be kept informed through communication that is directly targeted to them.¹⁸

In the context of COVID-19 and in response to calls from young people wanting to hear from people they relate to, the NSW Government engaged young people to co-design targeted messages, delivered by young people themselves. This resulted in the NSW MHCS recently engaging 12 Multicultural Youth

¹⁷ Lucini, B. 2014. 'Multicultural approaches disaster cultural resilience. How to consider them to improve disaster management and prevention: The Italian case of two earthquakes', *Procedia Economics & Finance*, vol. 18, pp. 151-156.

¹⁸ Advocate for Children and Young People. 2020. *Children and Young People's Experience of Disaster*, viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/disaster-report-2020>>.

COVID-19 Ambassadors to increase health literacy around COVID-19 amongst young people from CALD backgrounds connect with young people across the state.

The NSW Government worked with community to foster sustainable, local solutions to local issues

Case Study – NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service and COVID-19 Youth Ambassadors

Research indicated that young people have been significantly socially and economically impacted by COVID-19. As such, an opportunity was identified to support young people from CALD backgrounds through the co-design of a COVID-19 social media campaign.

In response, the NSW MHCS and the NSW Ministry of Health (supported by MNSW and DCS) engaged 12 Multicultural Youth COVID 19 Ambassadors to help connect with young people across NSW.

The social media campaign aimed to showcase videos co-produced with the youth ambassadors on platforms that are relatable and engaging to a diverse range of young people from multicultural backgrounds.

Facilitating locally driven responses to local issues is vital in providing effective support, while also respecting the agency of communities. Working with community ensures solutions are driven by community-led voices, with in-depth lived experiences. Creating opportunities for grassroots organisations to work collaboratively to address local issues was critical in the response to the Delta outbreak.

One example involves the creation of the Community Connectors Program overseen by MNSW.

Case Study – Multicultural NSW Community Connectors Program

In response to the need for better support for community networks and leaders as identified in the Sentiment Collection Analysis project, MNSW established the Community Connectors Program.

Focused on nurturing a 'local issues, local solutions' model, the program facilitates a co-designed, coordinated framework to work collaboratively with community leaders in providing nuanced, localised solutions for their communities. This was achieved through a local network of grant recipients across the 12 LGAs of concern to form local communities of practice to share strategies across cultural, linguistic, and religious communities.

The Community Connectors program gave community groups a voice in the design and delivery of COVID-19 relief efforts. It created new opportunities for collaboration across different communities who were experiencing similar needs and issues and new linkages between grassroots CALD organisations and larger mainstream providers of food and welfare relief. The Community Connectors program was vital in ensuring grant recipients were holistically supported on a peer-to-peer level and given the networks to better care for their communities.

The focus on accessibility of information when delivering key government information

The NSW Government recognised the need for quality assurance around messaging and communications, to ensure accurate language translations during times of crises

As a result of tracking community sentiment through the COVID-19 Delta lockdowns, MNSW found that community leaders frequently raised concerns around issues with in-language translations of

information. This included inaccuracy of translations, the use of overcomplicated or technical language, the speed of translated material, dissemination of information to the incorrect language group and a lack of available translations in minority languages.

Due to the communication loop established between MNSW and community leaders, the NSW Government was able to understand and address these translation issues as promptly as possible. This demonstrates the benefit of government agencies working closely and collaboratively with community leaders to understand who they were communicating with, test language and capture nuance. Activating these pre-existing relationships and engagement structures with communities was critical during the various COVID-19 lockdowns, to ensure that government messaging was well-coordinated, accurate and responsive to the needs of diverse communities during evolving issues arising during crises.

Case Study – COVID-19 Delta Outbreak Community Sentiment Project

A leader from the Bengali community advised they were having to translate government information from multiple sources into Kurukh, as the information distributed in their community was only translated into Hindi. While Kurukh is not as widely spoken as Hindi, there are distinct differences between these language groups.

The leader informed MNSW that this was causing confusion, as the Hindi translations often took on different meanings within their community. The leader informed MNSW that this was causing confusion, as the Hindi translations often took on different meanings within their community. As a result of the mistranslation and the lack of nuance, some members of the community were confused as to how seriously to consider the government messaging around the Delta outbreak.

This feedback was captured by MNSW's Community Sentiment Project and provided to relevant response agencies, to ensure messaging was delivered with the appropriate tone, language dialect and nuance.

It is important to note that the sentiment around translation issues reflected a broader issue around the need for greater quality assurance in the provision of language services generally, highlighting the necessity of engaging appropriately qualified and certified language service professionals. This position is supported by MNSW's *NSW Language Service Guidelines*, which provides guidance to agencies to support them on maintaining and adhering to best practices in the language services space.

One such best practice expectation encouraged by the Guidelines is to ensure agencies commission NAATI certified translators and interpreters, to ensure the service delivery is from a professional with nationally recognised credentials. A core function of MNSW's role as an agency is to provide cost-effective, trusted, and high-quality language services. As such, the expectation of NAATI-level qualifications is reflected in MNSW employed translators and interpreters.

The language service industry hosts a variety of non-government, privatized options that are not mandated to follow best practices encouraged by MNSW. As such, it is incumbent for agencies to ensure third-party, non-government services engaged for the translation or interpreting of critical information reflect the same high standards of qualification and credentials as advised and practiced by MNSW, to ensure quality assured communications for communities.

The importance of clear and concise language to ensure accessibility and empowerment to participate in decision making during emergency situations

In moments of crisis, access to concise and effective messaging is imperative to empowering individuals to make time sensitive decisions impacting their wellbeing. When communicating with CALD cohorts, considerations need to be made beyond the act of translation, including literacy levels in language, education, and comfortability in navigating potentially complex systems (such as legal, health or emergency settings).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was vital for the NSW Government to consider health literacies of the target audience groups. This guided approaches to delivering key health information. For instance, to ensure the delivery of clear, concise and easily understandable information, NSW Health was deliberate in using simplified, non-expert language wherever possible. NSW Health has also turned to alternate methods of reaching CALD communities, including adding health advice and communications into welfare food packs and distributed to communities.

To maintain effective communication, NSW Health ensured continual responsiveness to feedback from key audience groups. After community feedback noting that the language initially used was too formal and didn't resonate with young people, the NSW MHCS partnered with the University of NSW in research to identify ways in which to enhance communication with CALD communities in the pandemic. This led to the following actions:

- The development of the COVID-19 Glossary of medical terminology for immunisation and vaccine development in 31 languages.
- Communication skills workshops with community leaders and bilingual community workers to support them in their discussions about the vaccines with community members.
- Heightened awareness and support for community leaders and bilingual community workers as key agents in the design, delivery and dissemination of health information.

Clear, concise and accessible language is particularly vital when delivering messages that are sensitive in nature. This was demonstrated by DCJ and their delivery of social media messaging regarding domestic violence support.

Case Study – Advocating the domestic violence helpline during COVID-19

DCJ ensured the social media messaging during COVID-19 was deliberately simple for accessibility. Posts clearly displayed a call to action and phone numbers for crisis helplines. For example, social media tiles for victims of domestic violence conveyed the message, “You can leave home to get help for domestic and family violence.” These messages were produced in English, Arabic, Assyrian, Simplified Chinese, Traditional Chinese, Farsi and Vietnamese.

In addition, in-language communications (media statements, other assets) on COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown orders translated into different languages by other government agencies (e.g. MNSW) were shared on DCJ social media channels.

Leveraging existing community networks to respond during crises

In situations of emergency and disaster, a society that is connected is more capable, responsive and resilient to the impacts of crises. Genuine investment and engagement in community networks allows government's partnership with communities to evolve as the crisis evolves.

When the COVID-19 pandemic response commenced in March 2020, MNSW commenced a schedule of work involving community engagement, support and information provision. MNSW's ability to rapidly enliven these existing relationships during the early phases of the COVID-19 pandemic is testimony to the continuous investment placed into their community engagement arm of the agency.

For instance, many of the community engagement activities held by MNSW in partnership with other key response agencies reflected many of the forums that had been facilitated prior to the various waves of COVID-19. Of notable mention are the activities held in the period leading up to the Delta strain of COVID-19 pandemic, from March 2020 to July 2021, including:

- 47 religious leader forums
- 57 Regional Advisory Council network engagements
- 30 peak bodies and community group forums
- 27 humanitarian and settlement sector forums
- 9 Muslim leaders forums
- 6 consular corp forums

Total 176 forums

The valuable work undertaken by MNSW and the community pre-Delta allowed our approach to commensurately adjust as the crisis became worse and the virulence of the Delta strain increased transmission. A strong engagement foundation, pre-existing social capital and genuine partnership with the community through all phases of a crisis are vitally important.

Embedding communication strategies to reflect the diversity of our multicultural state

Ensuring best practice communication principles are embedded into agencies prior to crises builds capacities for greater preparedness during emergency situations. Developing and implementing strategic communications plans that reflect the diverse audiences of the state is one approach to assist readiness for crises, in-building measures to deploy that ensures information accessibility for all.

The NSW Government has a more general policy basis for the provision of language services published in the Premier's Memorandum,¹⁹ which requires NSW Government agencies to fund the provision of language services in order to provide all members of the public with equal accessibility to Government services. This mandate is entrenched the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*,²⁰ which provides that all individuals in NSW should have the greatest possible opportunity to make use of, and participate in, relevant activities and programs provided or administered by the Government of NSW.

¹⁹ Department of Premier and Cabinet. 2022. *M2021-04 Language Service Provision in Multicultural NSW*, NSW Government, viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://arp.nsw.gov.au/m2021-04-language-services-provision-in-multicultural-nsw>>.

²⁰ Section 3(1)(e), *Multicultural NSW Act 2000* (NSW)

NSW Government agencies demonstrate strategic commitment to inclusivity and accessibility for all audiences by way of plain English policy expectations. To ensure accessibility and inclusivity in design, digital.nsw²¹ advises that agency materials and content should be written for a reading level of age 9 or lower, increased to ages 12 to 14 when using technical language.

This plain English approach is also reflected in strategies put in place by the DCJ, who identified the need for all published material to be in plain English, with training offered to communication staff across the agency.

Case Study – Multicultural NSW utilised existing relationships with religious leaders during COVID-19

MNSW established the Religious Communities Forum in 2014 in recognition that religious leaders from all faiths play an important role in many of our diverse communities. MNSW's enabling legislation recognises that the people of NSW are of different religious backgrounds who are free to profess and maintain their own religious heritage.

The Religious Leaders Forum provides advice to MNSW on issues of interest and concern to the religious communities of New South Wales, and on strategies to support community harmony across religious differences.

This group originally had formal membership criteria however MNSW replaced the formal membership criteria of the group with a Statement of Purpose to anyone representing a faith group who was committed to the Statement of Purpose and wanted access to a structural mechanism to work with government for the betterment of their community.

This group expanded considerably during the pandemic and became a critical reference point for MNSW the around the implications of Public Health Orders on places of worship and faith communities

Communications planning for engaging with CALD communities is critical when responding to emergencies

Planning communications in a crisis can present many challenges for government organisations, as they are required to develop strategies and communication tactics in a rapidly changing and often chaotic environment. Developing a robust communications plan for government agencies to engage CALD communities can significantly reduce risk and ensure messaging is controlled. This is of particular importance for CALD communities, as communications often require greater nuance. However, core communication strategies must be balanced against broader resource considerations and the need to respond rapidly to the challenges that may arise during and after a crisis. It is also important that communication structures across government enable equal access to information, so CALD communities receive information concurrently with the rest of the population.

In the event of an emergency, frontline agencies need a robust crisis communications plan that articulates how their agency will communicate and work with CALD communities to address barriers

²¹ Digital.NSW. 2022. *Write in Plain English*, NSW Government viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://www.digital.nsw.gov.au/delivery/digital-service-toolkit/resources/accessibility-and-inclusivity/write-plain-english>>.

to communication and ensure key messages have 'reach'.²² Crisis communication planning and preparation can significantly mitigate risks of miss-communication, appropriately direct the co-ordination of information, and assist agencies to identify key communication channels - enabling a quick and effective response to the information needs of CALD communities.

The DCS undertook extensive communications planning during the recent COVID-19 Delta outbreak. This preparation was critical to ensuring CALD communities had equitable access to information. DCS worked with a range of NSW Government agencies and stakeholders – including NSW Ministry of Health, MNSW, NSW Police Force and RNSW – to deliver integrated crisis communications across multiple channels. This required an elevated level of cross-government co-ordination to ensure crisis communications were clear, accurate and consistent. Mechanisms used to engage and distribute information included:

- Paid advertising and media partnerships
- In language information sessions conducted in person and online
- Translations of assets including fact sheets, posters, videos, social tiles
- Working group meetings across government to discuss the needs and concerns of CALD communities
- Updated website content
- Frontline customer service communications via Service NSW.

DCS also used existing data sources and customer sentiment information to support crisis communication planning and to develop a deeper understanding of different languages and dialects; location demographics, preferred communications styles, sentiment around trust in government information, the relevance of cultural events and nuances. This enabled DCS and its subsidiary agencies to build community profiles, monitor responses to targeted information campaigns, and improve or adjust communication strategies as the events of the pandemic evolved.

Communications and messaging need to be accessible in physical and digital formats

There is a growing reliance on digitised formats when distributing communications and resources, due to its ability to reach wide audiences quickly and efficiently. As such, it is important to develop digital communications with translation needs in mind, to ensure inclusivity to diverse audience groups.

To ensure digital accessibility of materials, DCJ released its '*Accessibility for digital communications*' policy, to align with the plain English advice of digital.nsw, as noted above, but to also give due credence that it is "essential that consideration be given to providing content in: Easy Read format (for example, resources such as factsheets and information on how to find and use department services), languages other than English". The policy is supported by eLearning modules, to help staff understand the need to make digital communications accessible.

Following the rise of COVID-19, DCJ also developed a multicultural communications guide. The guide outlines best practice for understanding audiences, translation, messaging and selecting imagery.

²² Institute for Public Relations. 2007. 'Crisis Management and Communications', viewed 20 June 2022, <https://instituteforpr.org/crisis-management-and-communications/>.

A key risk of the increasingly digitised formats of crisis communications is the reliance on automated machine translation technologies, and how messaging can be miscommunicated through use of these technologies.

Although there are many benefits, the technology currently still holds certain risks when delivering vital emergency messaging. For this reason, various agencies have strict policy positions that do not allow the use of automated translation tools, including NSW Health.

The NSW Language Services Guidelines currently advise for any outputs from automated translation technologies to be paired with a human translator to provide quality assurance. This is especially vital when working with emergency messaging in times of crisis.

The importance of testing effectiveness with target audiences through monitoring

The NSW Government conducts communication campaign research regularly to ensure messages and channels are effectively reaching the communities they are targeting. This includes paid campaign, direct communications, and stakeholder engagement.

There has been significant bespoke evaluation for culturally and linguistically targeted advertising, including in-language focus groups in key languages for pre and post campaign evaluation and commissioning bespoke evaluation pieces. Findings from these have been integrated into the NSW Government's response to COVID-19.

MNSW recently conducted qualitative COVID-19 research with Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese speakers and found that crises communication requires a multi-faceted communications approach. It identified that providing multiple channels of communication through TV advertising, press conferences, experts and community and religious leaders contributed towards driving critical messages. Research within these same three language groups also showed that multicultural media, specifically SBS daily press conferences (live interpreting), can provide a consistent platform for credible and trustworthy advice.

Trust is similarly fostered by using trusted figures in the community. Research and feedback from the DCS's COVID-19 citizen campaign found utilising healthcare workers to deliver COVID-19 messaging was effective due to collective trust and respect. As a result, healthcare workers are central in delivering in-language messages to provide direct engagement with CALD communities.

Effectiveness of messaging is also measured by DCS through engagement metrics in-language EDM open rates, click-through-rates, click to open rates and download rates. With emails, where the recipient has not self-identified a language, NSW Government is now delivering consumer emails with links to translated versions of the email in Arabic, Vietnamese, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese and Korean; the top 5 translated languages on nsw.gov.au.

DCS also tested website content with CALD community focus groups, engaging research company *Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia* to understand community needs for information and current attitudes, concerns, and misconceptions about COVID-19. An example of the testing related to the usability of the www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19 website, tested to understand how participants engage with it, and uncover any areas for improvement or redesign.

Similarly, MNSW continues to test the effectiveness of current communication strategies by tracking EDM open rates and social media reach and adjusting messaging based on content the community engages with. The active evaluation and adaptation of communication strategies allows for the NSW Government to uphold a high degree of community engagement. Therefore, continued testing of effectiveness is vital in providing a foundation of trust which can be leveraged seamlessly in times of crisis.

Case Study – The Speak Out campaign

A NSW domestic and family violence campaign, Speak Out, launched by DCJ in mid-2020, during the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, was advised by a multicultural advertising agency on best cultural practices for posters and social media.

The following month an Australian Institute of Criminology report released in July 2020 July revealed an increase in domestic violence during the pandemic, with over 10 per cent of victims reporting it was the first time their partner had been violent towards them.

The campaign featured radio ads in Arabic, Cantonese, Hindi, Mandarin, Punjabi and Vietnamese. WeChat materials were also produced in Mandarin. The Speak Out campaign won 'Agency Campaign of the year' at the 2020 Premier's Multicultural Communication Awards award.

Cross-government collaboration is critical to ensuring efficient and effective communication is being disseminated by trusted CALD members and networks

Cross-government collaboration is critical to the effective implementation of the state's broader response to emergency management, for coordinated NSW crisis communications. Effective-cross government collaboration is critical in times of crises, as it:

- Ensures government agencies work towards a common goal.
- Enables the effective mobilisation of resources through the 'break down' of 'silos'.
- Centralises communication pathways to control public messaging.
- Ensures greater transparency in government decision making.
- Enables a more co-ordinated approach to risk management and the development of communication strategies.²³

²³ Ellis, L. D. 2022. *The Need for Effective Risk Communication Strategies in Today's Complex Information Environment*, Harvard School of Public Health, viewed 20 June 2022, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ecpe/effective-risk-communication-strategies/>.

Case Study – Cross-Government Collaboration and the COVID-19 Delta Micro Strategy

In response to the COVID-19 Delta outbreak, the NSW Government activated a range of key communication response mechanisms to engage CALD communities and improve accessibility of information. This included the establishment of the COVID-19 Delta micro-strategy, which consisted of eight 'strategic pillars' that brought different government agencies together to respond to the needs of communities. 'Pillar 5' of the micro strategy focused on the empowerment of communities to deliver local services and critical supports to those experiencing the harshest impacts of the outbreak. The Pillar 5 Steering Committee, led by Multicultural NSW, consisted of representatives from Aboriginal Affairs NSW, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Department of Customer Service, NSW Police, the Centre for Aboriginal Health, Resilience NSW, Regional NSW, Ageing and Disability Commission, and the NSW Office of Local Government.

The Pillar 5 micro strategy adopted a 'bottom-up' structure to integrate community voices into the whole-of-government response. Agencies within the Pillar 5 micro-strategy worked with CALD community leaders from across NSW to gain a deeper understanding of community sentiment. By hosting regular community forums and conducting qualitative interviews, the agencies were able to identify critical supports, better target communications for CALD communities, develop tailored service responses, and track community sentiment.

The information sourced through these mechanisms was then disseminated through the Pillar 5 structure to the Executive Sponsor Group responsible for leading the broader COVID-19 whole of government response.

The structure of the Pillar 5 micro strategy facilitated an important communication pathway between the NSW Government and CALD communities – enabling agencies to build trust with community leaders and act quickly in response to key priorities and issues as they unfolded. This resulted in the development of key initiatives to support CALD communities during the COVID-19 lockdowns, including new community grants programs and increased funding for CALD specific mental health supports.

As part of the streamlined Delta Micro Strategy structure, the NSW Government formed a Communications Group, chaired by a Deputy Secretary in DCS, bringing key decision makers together on a consistent and structured basis. This Communications Group had a focus on identifying opportunities for greater crisis messaging coordination and amendment of existing messaging in response to community insights and feedback. At the peak of the Delta outbreak crisis, the Communications Group met seven days a week for several weeks to ensure messaging remained responsive; meeting frequency evolved as the pandemic evolved, however the frequency of these meetings was critical to success, as it assembled necessary decision-makers with the knowledge and authorisation to agree on workplans in a timely and coordinated manner. Consideration should be given to taking the learnings of this model and integrating it into existing emergency management arrangements in the future.

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated how NSW Government agencies can successfully work together, and across governance structures, to address barriers to participation and meet the needs of CALD communities in times of crises.

Throughout the pandemic, these agencies drew heavily on input from community groups and networks to inform communications strategies when engaging CALD communities. Community insights and meaningful engagement with community leaders was critical to targeting and driving crisis messaging during the crisis.

The NSW Government recognised the need to support community networks and leaders to mitigate the risk of experiencing over-consultation and fatigue

Working with community networks to circulate information is vital but it is important to balance this with the risks that emerge from over-consultation. Noting that trusted sources are often preferred by CALD groups during times of crisis, community and faith-based leaders undertake significant responsibility to support their communities.

Serving as an intermediary between community and government, especially in a crisis context, can place significant emotional and mental tolls on an individual. Integrating community and faith leaders into decision-making processes and dissemination of information is an important practice to aid message efficacy, however uncoordinated engagement can risk over-consultation and fatigue. This is common amongst community and faith-based leaders who also serve as cultural mediators when facilitating external communication delivery to their communities.²⁴

Further to this, the impacts of consultation in times of crisis without the necessary support measures raises consideration for welfare of community leaders, which was reflected in MNSW's Sentiment Collection Analysis project. As a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns, leaders frequently reported feelings of 'fatigue', 'anxiousness', and 'hopelessness' across their communities. These feelings were attributed to rising case numbers, hospitalisations, uncertainty around when the restrictions end, and the loss of loved ones. In times of crises, it is not uncommon for there to be an 'elevated sense of stress and anxiety', which can drive a desire for guidance, transparency, and making sense out of what has happened'.²⁵ As leaders can at times feel responsible for the wellbeing of their respective community, the collective trauma can be amplified and have adverse long-term impacts.

²⁴ O'Brien, S. & Cadwell, P. 2017. 'Translation facilitates comprehension of health-related crisis information: Kenya as an example', *Journal of Specialised Translation*, vol. 28, pp. 23-51.

²⁵ Mendy, A., Stewart, M. L. & Van Akin, K. 2020. *A leader's guide: Communicating with teams, stakeholders and communities during COVID-19*, <[A leader's guide to crisis communication during coronavirus | McKinsey](#)>.

In response to these risks, the NSW Government delivered capacity-building workshops to better support community and faith-based leaders to respond to collective trauma and improve strategic communications. Providing education and the practical skills to understand how to communicate more strategically and navigate collective trauma was vital in the delivery of COVID-19 grassroots support.

Case Study – Social cohesion capacity-building workshops

DCJ delivered capacity building workshops during the second half of 2021. Targeted at strategic communication and collective trauma capacity building, the 35 Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19 online workshops were delivered for frontline workers in the 12 LGAs of concern. Among the 497 participants were large not-for-profits, faith leaders, peak bodies, advocacy, faith and cultural groups and a diverse range of council staff including community, advocacy, and social planning officers.

Most participants worked directly in the community with families, children, the elderly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Others were involved in designing programs to address emerging community needs.

The impact of the workshop is evidenced by results showing that more than 90 percent of survey respondents reported an improved understanding of:

- their understanding of the community and psycho-social impacts of collective trauma events, and
- strategic communications.

Additionally, 85 percent agreed they gained practical skills that will aid them in better supporting their communities.

C) Addressing racism and discrimination related to crisis communications

The NSW Government opposes all forms of hate, racism and discrimination and has mechanisms to monitor and support inclusive services and communications. NSW is proudly a culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse society, and is stronger for it. This is entrenched in the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000 (NSW)* that provides the rights and responsibilities of people in a multicultural society to live freely without fear of being subjected to racism or hatred.

Racism can appear in many forms of discrimination or vilification.²⁶ Discrimination exists in many forms, and may be direct or indirect, such as a rule or requirement for everyone that unfairly disadvantages a group of people with a characteristic protected by law. Racism can also be a form of vilification, in a public act to incite hate, serious contempt or severe ridicule to a person or group, on the basis of race, sexuality or infectious disease status.

Regardless of how it is presented, the NSW Government is committed to eliminating racism, hate and discrimination in all forms, as there is no place for racism, discrimination or religious intolerance in our multicultural state. This is particularly imperative during crises situations, where tensions and stress levels are likely elevated, enhancing existing vulnerabilities.

This was demonstrated during the various waves of COVID-19, where certain sentiments of racism and discrimination were amplified by the pandemic.²⁷ The 2021 Scanlon Foundation *Mapping Social Cohesion Report*²⁸ is a major national survey of public opinion on social cohesion. Its 2021 survey confirmed a significant rise in a view that racism is a 'very big' or 'big' problem (by 69% of Australians born in Asian countries compared to 59% in 2020; and by 57% of Australian-born citizens in 2021 compared to 36% in 2020).

The Lowy Institute *2021 Being Chinese in Australia*²⁹ survey noted falls in being treated less favourably due to their Chinese heritage (37% to 34% from 2020 to 2021) and fewer reporting verbal abuse (31% to 25% from 2020 to 2021). However, 18% of people surveyed had been physically threatened because of their heritage in this period. Agencies reported fewer complaints in the first half of 2021 compared with the later part of 2020, perhaps corresponding to the decline in COVID-19 case numbers.

This segment examines the forms of racism and discrimination that presented in NSW during times of crisis, most notably during the COVID-19 pandemic. This segment will also investigate approaches taken by the NSW Government, in collaboration with community groups and members, to address racism and discrimination in emergency communications.

²⁶ *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*.

²⁷ Ben, Jehonathan & Paradies, Y. 2020. 'Countering Racism during times of crisis', *Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation*, vol. 1, no. 1.

²⁸ Scanlon Foundation. 2021. *2021 Mapping Social Cohesion*, viewed 20 June 2022, <[2021 Mapping Social Cohesion Report - Scanlon Foundation](https://www.scanlonfoundation.org/2021-mapping-social-cohesion-report)>.

²⁹ Hsu, J. & Kassam, N. 2022. 'Being Chinese in Australia', *Lowy Institute*, <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/chinese-communities/report>>.

The NSW Government ensures inclusive crisis communication: it is collaborative with communities, across agencies and is sensitive to potential for stigmatisation

In emergency situations, NSW agencies have used partnerships across agencies and in multicultural forums with community leaders to collaborate effectively with CALD communities to create and distribute crisis communications.

An example of this is the partnership between DCJ and the NSW Ministry of Health who worked in consultation with CALD and multicultural stakeholders and audiences to seek their guidance on references, terminology, preferred language, tone and style on campaigns of support during a crisis.

The NSW Government collaborated with community leaders to combat conspiracy theories and misinformation

During the COVID-19 pandemic, community sentiment revealed rising levels of misinformation being shared in community. This was largely due to some community groups seeking information from various sources, including foreign media outlets, social media posts and unofficial websites. Misinformation was seen to be a mix between intentionally malicious misinformation, non-malicious incorrect information and strategic misinformation to support particular ideological views or beliefs, often in the form of conspiracy theories.

The spread of misinformation, disinformation and conspiracy theories around COVID-19 and the government response was a consistent concern since the beginning of the pandemic. These concerns intensified during the Delta outbreak and the vaccination roll-out.

Community leaders in South-West Sydney raised concerns with NSW Police Force and MNSW that their communities were feeling unfairly targeted by police in the enforcement of PHOs. This feeling was exacerbated on social media by the circulation of decontextualised footage of arrests that contributed to misperceptions about the police response. This was often juxtaposed against decontextualised footage of Eastern Sydney beaches featuring outdoor recreational activity. The deployment of the Australian Defence Force ('ADF') to assist in disaster relief efforts also raised concerns that refugee community members may be re-traumatised because of past experiences with authoritarian regimes in their countries of origin.

To combat this, the NSW Government recognised the important role of religious and community leaders as credible messengers and in countering misinformation. NSW Health and MNSW continued to empower leaders with accurate health information and advice to convey to their communities, in their own languages and in different media. DCJ provided support with communications strategy and development of content to help combat misinformation with several religious and multicultural associations.

NSW MHCS ensures translated materials are culturally responsive and inclusive, including community checks on text and images. This focus on cultural responsiveness includes explaining where a culturally diverse group is disproportionately affected (hospital restrictions affecting larger families; religious celebration restrictions may affect some groups more than others).

DCS tests new NSW.gov.au web initiatives in focus-groups, uses certified translators to ensure content is culturally sensitive and appropriate. For the NSW COVID-19 citizen advertising campaign, an award-winning Best Government Sponsored Campaign from 2020, DCS worked closely with NSW Ministry of

Health and MNSW to ensure all messaging, talent and creative work would be inclusive and effective. Wherever possible, the campaign used people with a background aligned to the target audience communities, to ensure messages resonate and to mitigate discrimination.

These examples show the value of working with community leaders and using multicultural teams. It ensured communities felt supported with timely, culturally nuanced information from their local, trusted source. Some results of communications collaborations with communities included alleviating the spread and impact of misinformation, lowering the risk of spread and effect of conspiracy theories in communities with lower levels of trust in governments and responding to community sentiment.

The NSW Government manages social media and online information channels to prevent posting outside of community guidelines racist or hateful dialogue

Community management systems for NSW government social media managed by DCS and the NSW Ministry of Health ensure abusive or offensive, racist posts are hidden or deleted. Social media sentiment, monitored across NSW agencies informs communication strategy and tactics. The Ministry of Health manages risks of vilification of specific communities by communicating directly with community leaders, instead of a one size fits all approach of mass communication.

The NSW Government has structural mechanisms to identify, monitor, share information and respond to racism and hate incidents during a crisis or emergency

The NSW Community Resilience and Response Plan ('**COMPLAN**'), established in accordance with the *Multicultural NSW Act 2000*, authorises MNSW to support integrated responses across NSW Government agencies to issues associated with cultural diversity in NSW and assist in resolving issues associated with cultural diversity. COMPLAN aims to maintain and promote community harmony, build community resilience, and better equip the State to prevent, limit, withstand, respond to, and recover from situations that threaten community harmony in NSW.

Case Study – Activation of COMPLAN in 2020 response to concerns of an increase in racial vilification

In February 2020, COMPLAN was activated under the Response arrangements to identify, monitor, and share information about racism and hate related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Seven COMPLAN Committee meetings were held between February and November 2020 and six meetings between February and November 2021 for this purpose.

To support COMPLAN, MNSW implemented a COVID-19 community engagement strategy which included weekly and fortnightly engagement forums with communities across NSW. Community members are encouraged to report incidents of vilification or discrimination to Anti-Discrimination NSW, and to report hate or bias crimes to the NSW Police Force.

While NSW agencies continued to support the public health response, the COMPLAN Committee provided a forum for agencies to examine some specific challenges the pandemic presented for social cohesion and discuss strategies for promoting community harmony.

Arrangements established under COMPLAN exist to support NSW state emergency management arrangements if an emergency, disaster or crisis (natural or human-generated) presents risks to, or consequences for, community harmony.

Experiences and perceptions of racism and racist scapegoating surrounding the pandemic, including anti-Asian and anti-Semitic sentiment, remained a concern for the COMPLAN leadership from 2020 through to present. The COMPLAN Committee provides a forum for NSW agencies to share information about reports of racist incidents and initiatives to tackle racism in NSW. Member agencies also participate in a range of engagement forums to raise community awareness of reporting and redress mechanisms and support services.

The NSW Government understands the importance and impact of leadership communications and has developed an evidence-based set of key messages and standard words for use in response to extremist or hateful incidents. This strategic communications approach is Cabinet-approved for use by NSW Government Ministers and agencies to support stronger social cohesion, rather than division and polarisation.

In late 2021, the NSW Government, through Multicultural NSW, coordinated a submission to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) on its proposed National Anti-Racism Framework. This was delivered through the COMPLAN Committee, in consultation with other key NSW Government agency stakeholders including the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Public Service Commission. The submission provides an overview of the NSW Government's commitment to addressing racism and racial inequality, as demonstrated through a wide range of legal protections, policies, frameworks, workforce development and training programs, community awareness campaigns, community partnerships and Indigenous reconciliation and reparation strategies.

Local Government NSW provided updates to COMPLAN on its Racism Not Welcome campaign endorsed by many councils in response to rising concerns about racist incidents during the pandemic.

Case Study – Addressing online and offline hate and promoting community harmony

During the initial wave of COVID-19 in 2020, MNSW increased the promotion of the Remove Hate From The Debate online campaign to empower young people with the tools and resources to speak out against online hate and promote community harmony.

The social media campaign has reached nearly one million people, with a peak period during COVID seeing the project reach 400,000 people in the six months from March-August 2020.

In 2022, MNSW engaged a strategic partner to review, update and refresh the Remove Hate from the Debate initiative. The strategic partner is working with community partners from the COMPACT Alliance in the review process. The review will build on the existing key components of Remove Hate from the Debate to build the capacity of communities to counter hate in both online and offline contexts.

The NSW Government seeks community sentiment insights from a range of sources

MNSW shared with COMPLAN members and other government departments and agencies, insights into community sentiment based on more than 700 1:1 in-depth qualitative interviews, conducted with community leaders during the Delta wave. Sentiment feedback was very helpful to track the effectiveness of a range of innovative, community-based supports to the hardest hit communities.

Community concerns related to the health impacts of the outbreak, perceptions of changing and conflicting advice around vaccines, the challenges of remote learning for school students, perceived inconsistencies in the application and enforcement of public health restrictions and the social and economic impacts of public health restrictions, especially in local government areas of concern in

South-West and Western Sydney (areas with the highest levels of cultural and linguistic diversity in NSW).

Seeing a community-based government response to support the hardest-hit communities, community leaders expressed through the interview process that they felt supported. Feelings of support increased 20% from late September to late October 2021 and continued to change as the pandemic changed. Community sentiment insights were shared to inform a coordinated government response to improve communication and immediate support programs.

The scale and speed of the Government response, via a COVID-19 relief community grants program led to almost immediate changes in community sentiment observed in community sentiment, shown through an increase in trust in government and in information delivered to the needs of communities.

MNSW was able to work with other agencies and leaders to empower communities to deliver much needed, local supports. This included over \$22 million across a range of grants programs to community and grassroots organisations, 15,000 temporary visa holders, local councils in affected LGAs and 74 multicultural media grants.

The NSW Government recognised the positive community response to stories and focus on “togetherness” in times of division

In 2020, DCJ activated a crisis communication campaign focused on togetherness and cohesion. The *Together Against COVID* campaign focused on generating quick-to-activate content, and amplifying positive community-generated content, through government channels and via stakeholders. It included a video curated from community-generated material highlighting how NSW’s diverse communities came together over the period. DCJ’s *Together Against COVID* social media posts achieved over 15 million views.

In 2021, in response to concerns around community anger and division, the Office of Community Safety and Cohesion, within DCJ, commissioned a social media ‘listening’ research project to monitor and investigate potential instigators for rising levels of tension. The project also sought to provide advice on how to combat the triggers of concern.

The project findings revealed more anger and division in 2021 compared to the first wave of the pandemic in 2020. These feelings were fueled by perceptions of unequal treatment (both within Sydney and in Western NSW), polarized debates over restrictions and freedoms, and a shift to division on vaccines and vaccine mandates.

However, a common trend recognised by the report was the positive impact that the sense of “togetherness” had on community. The report noted that amplifying stories and messaging of hope and “togetherness” helped reinforce the positive sentiment across NSW. Such examples included highlighting stories of support for healthcare workers, or cases of communities coming together, supporting each other, getting back to family, friends and business can all help with community sentiment. These stories of “togetherness” brought people together, to band behind a common cause.

It became clear that an effective measure to transform feelings of division, anger and hopelessness is through a conscious effort to balance the narrative. The introduction of strategic and genuine messaging of empathy, support and understanding can create a sense of togetherness in response to a crisis and helps to offset the high volume of strictly operational orientated language.

The NSW Government worked with communities, responding to concerns of unfair targeting by police in enforcing Public Health Orders

Community leaders in South-West Sydney raised concerns with NSW Police Force and Multicultural NSW that their communities were feeling unfairly targeted by police in the enforcement of PHOs. In response, the NSW Police Force and Multicultural NSW jointly engaged communities to communicate the facts about the police operation and the humanitarian role of the ADF in disaster relief and clarify any misperceptions.

The NSW Police Force worked directly with community leaders to provide context and empower them with correct information about specific arrests to counter unofficial and incomplete information circulating on social media. In response, the then NSW Police Commissioner held a press conference with a senior ADF representative to publicly clarify the role of the ADF in the pandemic response.

Sentiment analysis revealed community concerns that South-West and Western Sydney were being disproportionately targeted by government PHOs compared to other parts of Greater Sydney. Workers in these regions were less likely to be able to work from home and were therefore more likely

to be exposed to the virus. Larger households in these regions meant that workers were more likely to spread the virus to larger numbers of people. NSW Health confirmed that unpreventable transmission was the main factor contributing to high case numbers in these regions, while pre-existing social and economic conditions contributed to increased hardship for communities subject to PHOs.

These regions of Greater Sydney were suffering on many levels, and this was evident in community sentiment analysis. As well as monitoring the community harmony impacts of the pandemic, the COMPLAN Committee³⁰ shared information about strategies to support communities through the Delta outbreak and promote community harmony.

Responding to complaints about mask-wearing and other public health requirements, Anti-Discrimination NSW published information about peoples' rights and responsibilities during the pandemic in range of community languages and promoted these resources through its community engagement mechanisms.

To build an evidence base, DCJ's Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) undertook a study to analyse the impacts of police compliance of PHOs.³¹ The study analysed both enforcement data and self-reported survey data to assess whether patterns of non-compliance aligned with PHO breach notices given by police. The study found that males, people in LGAs of concerns and people with a prior criminal history were more likely to be breached. There was no evidence that people in areas of concern or young people were engaging in more non-compliant activities. Overall, BOCSAR noted that results suggest breaches are largely driven by police enforcement decisions, rather than patterns of non-compliance.

Safeguarding social cohesion workshops built resilience and relieved pandemic fatigue

Recognising the strain and exhaustion that many community workers were experiencing while supporting their communities through the Delta outbreak in 2021, the Office of Community Safety and Cohesion, DCJ collaborated with MNSW and RNSW to deliver a workshop series Safeguarding Social Cohesion during COVID-19. The workshops focused on addressing the community-wide psychosocial impacts of the pandemic and managing the information overload presented by the COVID-19 'infodemic'.

Presenters included experts in the fields of Collective Trauma Events and strategic communications. The workshops aimed to:

- Strengthen capability and build resilience to support community workers assisting their communities during COVID-19
- Strengthen understanding of the impacts of collective trauma on communities and the role of strategic communications during a crisis and in recovery
- Provide practical tools and techniques to support community facing workers assisting their communities

³⁰ Multicultural NSW. 2022. *NSW Community Resilience and Response Plan (COMPLAN)*, NSW Government, viewed 20 June 2022, <<https://multicultural.nsw.gov.au/complan/>>.

³¹ Rahman, S.2021. *Breaches of COVID-19 public health orders in NSW*, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, Viewed 20 June 2022, <www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/BB/2021-Report-COVID-breaches-BB157.pdf>.

- Raise awareness of the emergency management arrangements during a crisis.

Feedback from participants indicated an ongoing demand for similar programming to support young people in disproportionately impacted communities, including South-West and Western Sydney and some regional parts of NSW. Outcomes from the workshops:

- 35 online workshops delivered from September to December 2021 to almost 500 participants from more than 95 organisations including local government, faith and cultural groups, peak bodies, and NSW Government agencies.
- Over 90% of surveyed participants reported that workshops increased their understanding of the community and psycho-social impacts of collective trauma events and of strategic communications.
- 84% reported an increase in their knowledge of emergency management arrangements in NSW.
- 85% agreed they gained practical strategies to support their communities.

COMPACT Alliance community networks share and learn from community experiences

The pandemic highlighted the important purpose of the COMPACT Alliance as a community resilience network committed to standing united against divisive influences as a force for community harmony.

The COMPACT Alliance met throughout 2021 to share insights and learn from each other's experiences. In August, the Alliance came together over the course of three out-of-session COMPACT Action Group meetings to share strategies on:

- Personal wellbeing and collective trauma during the pandemic.
- Engaging and inspiring young people in a lockdown.
- Navigating the "infodemic" and the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories.

COMPACT projects inspired young people to stand united as champions for harmony

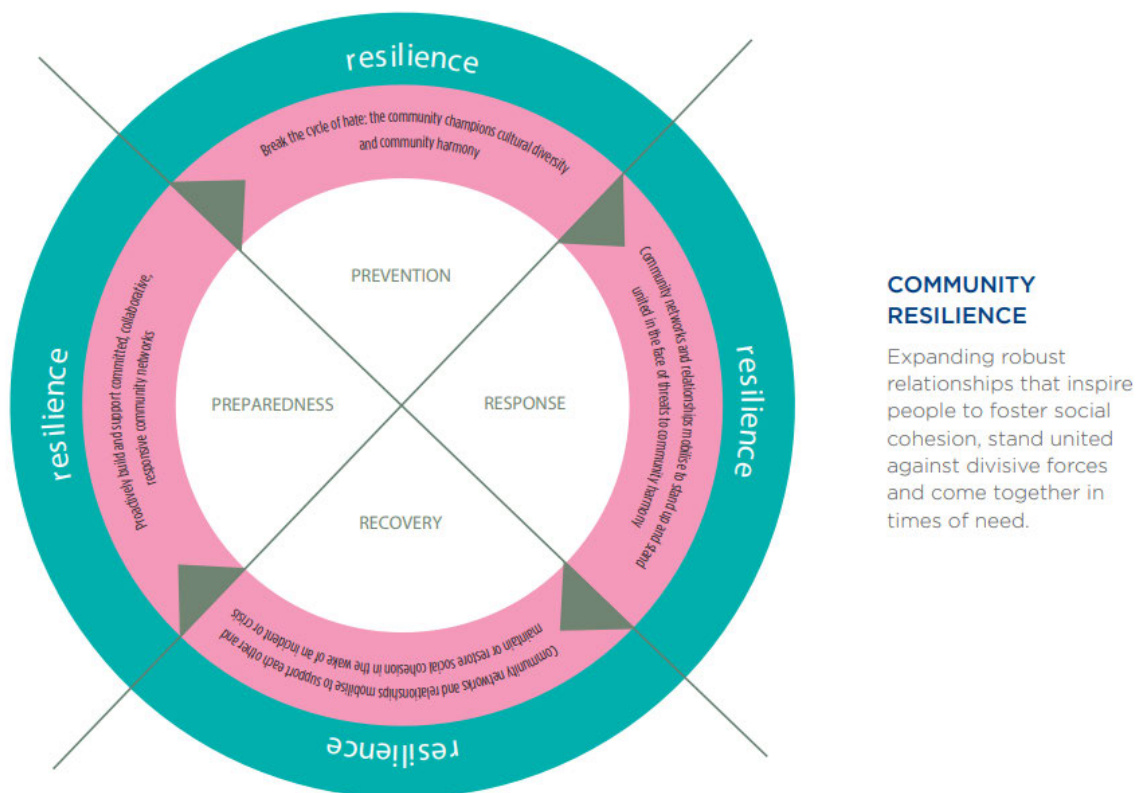
The NSW COMPACT Program aims to inspire and empower young people to stand up and stand united as champions for community harmony against the divisive forces of hate, fear and violence.

Since 2021, the COMPACT Program supported 15 new youth engagement projects involving more than 50 partner organisations. As the Delta outbreak in 2021 had an impact on projects activities, approval was granted to extend the timeframe of these 15 projects until 30 June 2022 including the provision of extra funding if required. The NSW Government committed ongoing annual funding of \$3.35 million in 2021, to expand a proven COMPACT Program and related initiatives to counter hate and division.

In November 2021, Multicultural NSW opened a special round of COMPACT grants for six-month projects with a focus on supporting community-led initiatives that strengthen community connectedness and togetherness as a core component of community resilience and recovery in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; in January 2022, grant funding was approved for 19 new COMPACT Social Cohesion and Community Resilience projects under this latest round.

COMPACT was designed in 2015 after an extensive process of community consultation and expert analysis of international best practice. The program is underpinned by a whole-of-society resilience-based approach with four core components:

- **Preparedness:** Proactively build and support committed, collaborative responsive community networks.
- **Prevention:** Break the cycle of hate through the championing of cultural diversity and community harmony.
- **Response:** Community networks and relationships mobilise to stand up and stand united in the face of threats to community harmony.
- **Recovery:** Community networks and relationships mobilise to support each other and maintain or restore social cohesion in the wake of an incident or crisis.



In its first four years (2016-2020), the COMPACT Program supported 24 youth engagement projects involving close to 60 partner organisation and engaged more than 40,000 young people. An independent evaluation of COMPACT by Urbis found the program to meet objectives and demonstrated significant benefit to the community.

Unfortunately, there are fringe elements in our society who seek to exploit times of crisis to sow distrust, divisiveness and discord. These divisive influences often thrive in the online environment, and this remains an ongoing challenge for social cohesion. Strengthening and safeguarding our social cohesion will continue to be a core focus for the NSW Government as we learn to live with COVID and respond to future crises. Community empowering programs run in partnership with the Government such as COMPACT help address racism and discrimination in a crisis, including crisis communications.

Conclusion

This Submission explored the critical role played by community leaders and networks, acting as trusted information intermediaries in the distribution of in-language information, especially to harder to reach groups. Bureaucratic structures were streamlined to encourage more accessible pathways of two-way dialogue with community, to increase understanding of their lived experience and inform responses. Whilst the opportunity for continual improvement by government exists, this collaborative partnership resulted in the delivery of tailored and in-language information that was critical to the public health and safety of the state.

Fundamental to improving channels of communication with CALD communities, this Submission identified the necessity of embedding best practice communication principles prior to situations of crisis, to in-build greater capacity to respond when emergencies arise. This was reflected in the NSW Government's ability to activate existing mechanisms and enhance responses commensurate to the evolving pandemic.

The COVID-19 response was also testimony to the incredible work of the communities of NSW, who enthusiastically responded when provided the opportunity to inform phases of planning, developing and implementation of policies, procedures and communications. The NSW Government recognises and commends their individual and collective resilience when faced with protracted adversity.

Finally, it is important for departments and agencies to recognise that in times of crisis, situations of racism, hate and discrimination can both foster and compound the stress and tension felt by communities. This Submission examined ways in which the NSW Government addressed the risks of discrimination during times of crisis communications, using the most recent COVID-19 pandemic as a case study. The NSW Government continued to embed the collaborative approach, partnering with communities for guidance on references, terminology, preferred language, tone and style for government communications. This work resulted in the provision of support for community workers to build resilience, and the boosting of positive community responses and messages of hope, resulting in a greater sense of togetherness that helped bring people together and identify with a common cause. In response to racist or hateful dialogue, the NSW Government implemented a multi-channelled approach, with teams actively preventing hateful speech on social media and websites, while a broader integrated, cross-agency mechanism through the COMPLAN program was utilised to respond to racism and hate incidents, with weekly and fortnightly engagement forums with communities across NSW.

Crises are an inevitable reality and present a range of challenges for governments and communities alike. Some cohorts are at greater risk of experiencing compounded barriers which are complex and require tailored, nuanced responses. This is especially vital when delivering time-sensitive, crisis messaging, as effective and accessible communications play a core role in ensuring operational success in emergency management. As identified throughout this Submission, the process of developing, delivering and refining crisis communications with CALD communities should be an in-built, standard emergency management practice for government agencies. This will establish a strong foundation for crisis response across the state, prepared for the next emergency.