

**REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY SERVICES**

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

**At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Monday, 17 October 2022**

**The Committee met at 10:00 am**

**PRESENT**

Mrs Melinda Pavey (Chair)

Ms Trish Doyle  
Mr David Harris  
Ms Jenny Leong  
Mrs Nichole Overall

**MEMBERS PRESENT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE**

Mr Justin Clancy (Deputy Chair)  
Ms Melanie Gibbons

**The CHAIR:** Good morning, everyone. Before we start, I'd like to acknowledge the Gadigal people, who are traditional custodians of this land. I pay my respects to Elders of the Eora nation, past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are present. I am Melinda Pavey. I'm Chair of the Legislative Assembly's Community Services Committee. With me today are my colleague in party as well as Committee, Nichole Overall, member for Monaro. Trish Doyle is on her way from the Blue Mountains. Jenny Leong, member for Newtown, is here—and David Harris, member for Wyong. Joining us via technology is Mel Gibbons and Justin Clancy. This is our second hearing for our Committee's inquiry. We have witnesses taking part via video and in person. We very much appreciate your time today with your incredibly busy schedule and magnificent résumé that we got to read. We thank you very much for coming in.

**Distinguished Professor JIM MACNAMARA**, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** Professor, did you have an overall short opening statement that you'd like to make in relation to our Committee and your interactions during our COVID period?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I was advised that you would prefer to go straight into questions, so I haven't prepared.

**The CHAIR:** We'll go straight into questions, then. That's fine.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I'm in your hands.

**The CHAIR:** How do you think we communicated with members of New South Wales during the COVID crisis?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** Overall I think the Government has done very well. It is seen to have done well, even by other countries. I'm an expert adviser on public communication to the OECD. Discussions at that level—they've actually looked at New South Wales' Department of Customer Service as having done some excellent work. The predominant communication, of course, has been mass media advertising. That does reach a large proportion of the community. But we live in an age when circulation and audiences of media are declining and when trust in media is declining.

When we turn to CALD communities and particularly refugee communities and recent immigrants—many of those don't engage as much with our traditional mass media, for language reasons or trust reasons. They're more likely to be on Weibo. Some even come from countries where they have escaped oppressive regimes, and they do not necessarily trust government, and they turn to other sources. I think the Government has done some excellent work. There are a lot of commendations for the level of community engagement that's happened through the New South Wales Government in recent years. But, when we come to CALD and refugee—I include refugee communities particularly, as they are often very recent members of our community—there are some gaps that we identify in research.

**The CHAIR:** It appeared from witnesses we had in our last hearing that it was the on-the-ground communication, at a very grassroots level, that actually made the difference in reaching out to those particular communities you referred to, our refugee communities, who don't trust government necessarily and/or media. Have you had any experience or conversations with those community groups and anything to offer to us on that, Professor?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** Yes. That's very true. In those communities—I grew up in the bush as a kid. I think it's the same even in Western communities. We trusted local spokespersons. We didn't trust people in Brisbane or Canberra to be honest—

**The CHAIR:** We still don't.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I think that's a case—

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Neither do the folks in the city, half the time—just to be clear.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** True. But it's accentuated when you belong to an immigrant or a refugee community. I'm currently leading research for the World Health Organization, globally evaluating its COVID campaign. So I've done a lot of work across many countries. I've also done an evaluation of the CALD community, advertising and communication during 2021. I'm currently doing research with refugee communities, specifically in south-western Sydney.

In those studies what you find is that, when you actually go and talk to people on the ground, where do they go for information? Some do go to official government sites, but many of them are going to Weibo, overseas

newspapers where there is a lot of misinformation and local community leaders. The definition we have found of "community leaders" is not necessarily always official leaders. They may well be the chair of a refugee association or a leader of a particular Tamil or whatever group, but very often you discover them by looking on social media and seeing who is helping and posting messages to help people. We found people with no particular title contacting local businesses in south-western Sydney and translating the Government's messages to them and advising them on how many people could be in their shop and so forth. It is time consuming to do that work, to find out those people but, ultimately, I think it is cheaper and more effective than putting ads on TV.

**Mr DAVID HARRIS:** My first question goes to what you were talking about. Because in the situation with COVID there were different rules for different areas and the rules changed fairly rapidly, did your interactions find any problems with how you get a coherent message out in that environment?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I think it's fair to say that there are real challenges for government when you are in a very dynamic situation and you are trying to get accurate information out. One of the fears we have found among some of the government agencies and various associations is that they are frightened of devolving the responsibility of any communication. They fear that people will go off message. There have even been a few comments that some local community leaders could be a loaded gun. We have heard that comment, which is a little bit cynical. There is risk involved. I think we've got to be really frank about that. But I can't see how we can do it and reach all corners of the community without a collaborative effort.

There is some really encouraging research coming—even since I wrote my submission—out of the UK and the OECD, which I can make available if required. It actually finds that people are surprisingly responsive and helpful in a crisis. They use the words, "People rise to the occasion." I think we have perhaps undervalued what our communities can do. Maybe we can devolve more work. It takes a lot of engagement. I don't think you let it run out of control. I think you have to place communication people and community workers into those communities. But working with those communities, to me, is essential because that is where a lot of people go for their information. They don't necessarily go to the Government website.

**Mr DAVID HARRIS:** It is a really good point because even with the flooding—quite a few of us have been involved with the floods—in terms of communication we keep getting told about the one point of truth. They want one point of truth so that the message is the same message getting out to everyone. But that makes it very difficult when you've got to then put that message across different communities. I wonder if you could tell us a little bit more about the term—and I love the term—"culturally compelling," not just "culturally appropriate"?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I think that goes into really understanding the community. I have spent my life in communication, working from being a journalist all the way to being a professor of communication. The best answer we can often give when someone says, "How do we communicate?" is to say, "I don't know," and to actually ask the audience. We've got to be more audience centric. In fact, I'm writing a paper at the moment about how our communication industries are still very media centric. We focus on the media and we assume that people will come to the media, but we've got to be audience centric and ask people. I did some work several years ago, working in breast screening campaigns with Indian and Sri Lankan communities. We had no idea how to reach those communities. The breast screening rates were very low. We went and asked them and they came up with ideas that I never would have come up with. They wanted to have pledges, they wanted to have a fashion show and they even wanted a calendar. The Department of Health went, "Whoa, this is crazy."

**The CHAIR:** "This wasn't our idea."

**JIM MACNAMARA:** It worked. The Pink Sari campaign won four international awards and it worked. It lifted mammograms by 15 per cent against the target of 5 per cent. A lot of it is that honesty of being audience centric and listening to people. I accept that we must accept there are risks. The single point of information maintains accuracy, but it also misses a big chunk of the audience.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Thank you so much for your submission and for sharing your experiences. To go off the back of something you just mentioned then and a question in relation to looking at how you find who those community leaders are, you also talk about the idea of scenario development and actually modelling how that would work in various scenarios. I wonder how you would see that operating practically and if you can point to any good examples where you've seen that work. We obviously know there are going to be future natural disaster crises or other crises in New South Wales. We know that those informal community leaders are there. You talk about scenario development. What would you think that would look like? What kinds of recommendations do you think this Committee could make to try to undertake some of that work?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I suppose at the end of the day it comes back to that one key word, "engagement", but engagement not as something you do when a crisis occurs but engagement. When we look at crisis communication one of the things I pointed out in my paper is preparation is everything. One of the key elements

of preparation is putting relationships in place, knowing in advance who are those community leaders. You may not need them. Hopefully, you won't need them for some years to come. But one day you will. If you don't have those relationships, if you don't know who those people are—the Government has an infrastructure that can enable it to do that if it does devolve responsibilities. In south-western Sydney we're working with the South-Western Sydney LHD. The LHD's got relationships with at least a dozen community groups. So we're reaching out to those community groups. In fact, right now we're having consultations with them and asking them, "How would you communicate messages?" I'm talking health messages in this particular case. We're asking them, "What media do your people go to? Who do they turn to?" Names get put forward. Certain media get put forward.

So I think building those relationships, using those devolved networks—when something does happen, you then call on that leveraged model that you can use. Another simple thing—we've also gone beyond those groups. When I say "risks"—there's also lobbying and interest. You have to be carefully screening it. But we also did a lot of social media monitoring to look at who was commenting on COVID and who was distributing messages. We found names we'd never heard of. They didn't sit on any official list. But they were distributing messages to local media. They were offering help to people. We thought, "We'll find out who that person is and reach out to them because they're obviously an ally. They're obviously an advocate. They're on side. They are mobilised to help."

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Can I thank you for your submission as well. I thought it was very thorough and very useful. Can I also suggest that in future, I think, members of Parliament also need to be part of that conversation. We have our lists and networks. We're monitoring all the social media chats as well. But I found there was a bit of a lack, at the start, of getting our opinions and our networks as well. We tend to know a lot of the community leaders and know who are listened to. But there wasn't an official place for us to put that information. I think that could be harnessed in the future as well.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I think it's a very good point. I certainly as a country boy know that the local MP knew everybody and knew who to trust and who not to trust.

**The CHAIR:** If you're a good one.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Just on the back of that, Mel, it's worth capturing, just so we have it, one of the things, to their credit, that happened in the communication with public housing tenants in high-rise in the inner city. After the lockdown occurred in Victoria of one of those high-rise buildings, which was horrific and which then caused trauma, we actually worked really closely with Housing, and Land and Housing, in the communication. We saw draft messages that were going out. We coordinated our comms around that. I think that was a good example of where it can work in a way where everyone is focused on not trying to add to the panic and to the fear. It did actually reassure people because our messages were the same as what was going out officially. That worked well. It's a good point.

**The CHAIR:** It's a really good point, Jenny. That is but one agency. It's good that you've acknowledged that. I think Mel's point needs to be incorporated into our final report very strongly. We will pick up on your offer of the work in the UK and other places too because, as you've said in your brief, a kilogram of prevention is worth a ton of cure.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** Thank you, Distinguished Professor, for being with us today and for your work and your thoughts. They are thought-provoking. I just wanted to provide that feedback. I was caught up with some of the comments and thinking about how we frame messages around values and whether we—in communication with others so that our communication with communities is effective—are respectful of the different values that exist. I'm not only thinking about some of what I experienced and saw being experienced and that heart-wrenching lack of acknowledging different values. But also in my own community there was, through the fires and that natural disaster, a real lack of trust. There seemed to be a lack of understanding of different values as well. I'm also a country girl—now in the Blue Mountains but grew up in the Riverina. We've got a really large refugee support group in the Blue Mountains. One part of the feedback they provide me is that there is a lack of understanding values and talking to people about values. Would you comment on the way in which the mainstream tries to incorporate cultural values and might miss the mark? What might we be able to learn from that?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** The things we found in research when we were working with CALD and refugee communities was—and these are slightly generalisations but fairly wide. Mostly they are collective communities rather than highly individualistic communities. That is a great benefit right there. They are very community minded in most cases, probably much more so than many Western communities. They are community minded. We've found very often a preference for interpersonal communication still and we seem to be a very mass-mediated society. We tend to love mass communication. The first instinct is to put ads on TV, so we found that sometimes they—and we evaluate those ads by awareness. And people did see the ads very often, but did they do anything as a result or believe them? No. That's what we found.

They cluster geographically, as we know. They have religious beliefs and there are values that affect them as well as religion. We found in the case I mentioned—the Indian and Sri Lankan communities—one of the major reasons they didn't get breast screens was superstition and fear if disease was in the family the marriage prospects of daughters would diminish. Now, we would never have assumed that as Westerners and it seems silly but that's a very bad judgement. We had to accept that that was a real concern. These women were really concerned about the welfare and the future of their children. To me, every time we do this research, I have become over the years a great fan of participatory action research, where you literally go into a community and you co-design and collaborate on finding the solutions. There's a wonderful phrase that sobers up us academics and that is that people are the best theorists of their own world.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** You mentioned in your submission the 2022 leaders' report, which finds that less than half of government communicators have the capability to evaluate citizen engagement activities. I wonder if there's more detail around that report that you're able to share with the Committee?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I have that report. It's actually produced by a big agency, WPP. I was one of many interviewees. They do it around the world. We can certainly provide that report to you. But that's also a fairly common finding. One of my specialties—most of my work is built around evaluation of communication campaigns. Consistently we find in evaluation studies that we tend to not measure what we call outcomes and impact. We tend to measure media, social media accounts, media articles, media favourability. We might measure awareness of an ad, but at the end of the day the only thing that actually matters is what in evaluation language we call outcomes and impact. That means you've really got to talk to the audience and find out what they're thinking, what they're doing and why they're doing it—and is your communication having any part in that? If it's not, then we've got to adjust. There's a whole raft of evaluation literature that still says measuring that deep audience-level engagement and their behaviours and the outcomes—there are some fields like behavioural insights that go into that now, but still the bulk of our evaluation—about 90 per cent—is measuring media content.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Following on from one of the conclusions that you identify—number eight, around communicating with CALD communities, "culturally appropriate" and embedded within socio-cultural contexts, and you give a few points around what that needs to include—I wonder, given your international perspective on this, whether there are any jurisdictions you can point to that do this well? Are there any good projects or models that you feel manage to really capture the idea of communication to diverse communities through a crisis or through the COVID communications that we should be looking to, or that New South Wales could be looking to learn more from?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** That's a really hard question. There are pockets. At the moment the open government unit of the OECD in Paris is looking at producing guidelines on community engagement and listening. They are talking a lot to the New South Wales Department of Customer Service as one of the better ones. To be honest and to be fair, I think Australia and New South Wales are doing quite well, relatively speaking. Bear in mind a lot of countries' governments are extremely top-down and authoritarian, where the experts know best and they just tell people what to do. Since the whole Department of Customer Service was established there has been that customer-centric focus. I think it just needs to go a step further into audience focused.

It's a challenge. It actually is relatively easy to put a \$10 million or \$20 million ad campaign on TV. It's not that difficult. We've got agencies that will go and do the work and up it goes. It actually is quite difficult to work with multiple stakeholders in multiple communities to do a lot of listening to try to keep reasonable control of the message. That is a much harder way to go. But at the end of the day, reaching into some of those communities, I think it's an essential way to go. That's been the shift in theory in health communication to what we call culture-centred and social ecology-type models.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Finally, Chair, if I may, can I ask in relation to the use of the term—I think you said you prefer the term "non-assimilated immigrants and refugees". I guess I put a challenge to you or a question around that. I'm not sure what that extra sound is, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Is that you, Mel? Do you want to go on mute?

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Or maybe it is Justin.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** It's not me.

**The CHAIR:** It was Justin.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Sorry, we sounded like we were having an earthquake while we were having a discussion about crisis communications. I appreciate the discussion around not using "non-English-speaking background". My concern around that phrase is, particularly, the trauma and difficulties that communities have had with the concept of assimilation and the historical context around that. I just wanted to give you the chance,

because I have serious concerns about the use of that phrase and see it as a much more negative connotation and trauma-inducing phrase than I would "non-English-speaking background". I wonder if you wanted to reflect on that in the context of your submission?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** It's a dangerous area to go into because there is no agreement that I can find between industry, government or academics about how to refer to these communities.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Or, indeed, the communities themselves.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** All I know is "culturally and linguistically diverse" pretty much covers the entire Australian population. We are all culturally and linguistically—and it doesn't really identify those most in need. The word "assimilated" has become loaded and perhaps is the wrong word. I'm not arguing for that. Bear in mind the term "CALD" came out of the Bureau of Statistics as a statistician's way of classifying people so that is not a particularly human way to go about it. Whether "assimilated" is the right word—but what we are really talking about is that people, because of language or experience, are not connected well into our community—

**The CHAIR:** And economics.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** —and therefore they have gaps in access to information and access to services. I do think somewhere we're going to need a more precise way to refer to those communities that is still in a respectful way.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Thank you, I appreciate that context.

**The CHAIR:** Can I ask you about some of the concerns that came out during the pandemic? Decisions were being made in a crisis situation, and some of our western Sydney and south-western Sydney communities felt that they were being unfairly attacked and picked on. Do you have any comments or suggestions to make in relation to those racial stereotyping criticisms that came out during the pandemic?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** It's a hard one. From a cultural perspective, identifying LGAs and classifying people that way is harmful, and it caused those people stress. I suppose it's one of those ones where we've also got to be mindful of the operational imperatives—how do you control a rapidly spreading pandemic? Crisis communication is one of those areas where I do communication, but I also have to work with people with operational responsibilities, and it's often a matter of balancing the two. I can't think of a better way they could have tried to prevent it. I think New South Wales did better than Victoria, because there's now a lot of criticism of those extended lockdowns.

You mentioned trauma; I think we created as much or more trauma by lockdowns in some areas than COVID might have created. But, again, that's in hindsight; we're all experts in hindsight. At the time, in the midst of a crisis, decisions have got to be made. I have lot of sympathy for the heads of Health and other emergency services that are making those decisions. It's the same in floods at the moment: Roads are closed and people are moved out of their homes, and great stress is caused. All I can say is I think, again, it's collaboration; it's having culturally minded and communication-minded people in the planning room with the operational people to balance the decisions that are made. I know that's not a complete answer to the question, but it is a tricky one.

**The CHAIR:** Will there be an international report on the timeliness and appropriateness of reactions in any of the international groups that you're working with?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** There's not an evaluation specifically of, around the world, COVID. There are bits and pieces of reports. The Victorian lockdowns are the subject of quite a bit of discussion going on internationally. Certainly my colleagues and I are contributing a lot to the overuse, still, of mass media as an answer and advocating for more culturally centred and more community-based approaches.

**Mr DAVID HARRIS:** Can I just make a point on that? Sorry to interrupt. That's exactly right, because our media is becoming more and more centralised and there's very little regional media left. That one message for all is failing dismally because, as we found in the regions, the messages coming out of Sydney were actually wrong in our communities, which confused people no end.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** Yes, it's a good point. You've got the loss of regional media, with a vastly shrunken media, but the audiences and the circulation are way down. If you look at certain demographics of young people, no-one is watching television. They may be consuming mass media content via a phone and via a newsfeed. And then there's the trust issue in media, as well. The Edelman Trust Barometer, I think, is putting media trust at around 40 per cent; 60 per cent of the population don't trust our own media. It does tell us we have to look beyond media. We don't abandon media, but we have to look at a broader concept of media. And by the way, the word "media", of course, means intermediaries. I see those community leaders and those community groups as key media.

**Mrs NICHOLE OVERALL:** The other point to reference on regional media is that if we're fortunate enough to have newspapers, for example, they may be weekly rather than daily, so it's also a timeliness factor in being able to provide relevant information.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** Yes, we probably can make better use of radio. Believe it or not, it's probably the medium that will come back. It's very important media in countries like Indonesia and parts of the Philippines and so forth, where you can get immediacy and you can use multiple languages. But even in the translations, by the way, one of the things we've found is that some of the communities were not literate even in their own language. They were oral cultures, so we spent a lot of time translating things into 30 or 40 languages only for the fact most of them didn't read it. That's where we found one of these local community non-leaders—not officially a leader—on the telephone reading messages to local businesses, explaining what they meant.

**The CHAIR:** And just keeping in mind too, in my own area ABC Radio is 10 per cent of the ratings and the commercial radio is about 50 per cent of the ratings and the commercial media don't like to spend much on journalists. Thank you very much, Professor, for your testimony. Mr Clancy, sorry: I didn't see your hand up, I'm sorry.

**Mr JUSTIN CLANCY:** I did, Chair, but that's okay. We probably don't have time.

**The CHAIR:** No. Go for it. Do it.

**Mr JUSTIN CLANCY:** Thank you. Professor, very quickly, organisationally then, as a government, are there any tips on how we maintain focus? As you said, coming from the bush, with things like bushfires, we're all aware in the immediate post period, but then down the track we lose a level of corporate knowledge. Do you have any thoughts in that space?

**JIM MACNAMARA:** I think we have a number of networks established, but it seems we're running into crises more and more frequently, whether they're climate change orientated or health. It seems to me that the incredible networks that are established at the moment during the floods, and that were established in the fires—a way of consolidating those networks and preserving them and maintaining them in some form of register and some form of formal network where community leaders—and it's also a good way to identify those who've really done a good job. You soon find out who can be trusted and who's not. So I think in the floods, COVID, and in bushfires, we must have the access to be able to establish—and I haven't got a fancy name for it yet—but there seems to be a very, very powerful extended community network that Government could work with and have it available. Keep an online presence, keep in touch, and then, when something does happen, you reach out to those people we've already got a relationship with. So I think it's a very important area to look at and your point about loss of corporate memory, I think, is very good.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr JUSTIN CLANCY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Professor.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Thanks so much for your time.

**JIM MACNAMARA:** Thank you. Good luck with your inquiry.

**(The witness withdrew.)**

**Mr RUSSELL ANDERSON,** Chief Executive Officer, National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council and Chief News Director, Multilingual News Service, National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** I welcome Mr Russell Anderson from the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council. I have to say your submission is excellent. Do you have any questions about the hearing process, Russell?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** I am just checking; You can hear me okay?

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** We can now, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. What a lovely radio voice.

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** Thank you. I also have a good microphone. Yes, I've read about the hearing.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Russell. In relation to access to information for our communities during the pandemic, how important was the establishment of your national media processes to helping in getting that communication out there that you did in 2020?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** It was really very, very crucial, I think, because, if you look at it, the most people that died from the pandemic were people that were not born in Australia, so we clearly were in the right audience where we needed to get the message to when we started this whole process. We're normally a peak body that advocates and does work on a higher sort of level, but we realised when COVID hit that we needed to do something about this, because our stations might be in jeopardy and broadcasters would have to be at home because of the pandemic. So we started this news service in eight different languages and within three weeks we were broadcasting 170 news bulletins at 29 radio stations across the country. So it took off. People wanted the information; they saw the need. They were very open to getting that information to broadcast it on their radio station, because they really wanted to get that information to their communities. So it was crucial. It was really well accepted and crucial information that we were delivering.

**Mrs NICHOLE OVERALL:** This is Nichole Overall, the member for Monaro. As part of that, could you please talk with us a little bit about the funding or other forms of support that you've received to be able to do that and how that might look going forward as well?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** When the pandemic started, we asked for money from various governments, and everybody was scrambling. Philanthropic trust funds had no money and people were pulling out of them. So we used our own funding to start with. That lasted for four months. The Victorian Government picked us up in September 2020, and we are still going with the Victorian Government until March next year. So that will be 2½ years of funding from the Victorian Government, until March next year. We eventually got funding from the New South Wales Government in January of 2022. That funding stopped in August. So we have no more funding from the New South Wales Government to continue to do this.

Because of what we have been able to achieve in getting such a high profile, we have got funding from Facebook and the Walkley Foundation to start a national news service. We have started that now, and what we're doing is we're filling COVID and flood information now into that news service as well as general news. But, of course, that funding goes until March next year. If that stops, then basically the whole system and framework that we've set up will no longer be in place. We hope to keep it going. We'd like to do news anyway—a centralised news system where we get information out. But if we have to close that down in March next year and there's another pandemic of some sort, then we have to reinvent the wheel, get everybody back on board and start delivering the information again. We hope that we can maintain a structure so that if something happens in the next year, two, three or four down the track, then we have something in place. We're approaching the Victorian Government, New South Wales Government and Federal Government, and trying to get Facebook and other funding opportunities to keep this centralised system going. We hope to build it back up again to be at least 200 broadcasts a week. We're aiming for something like 30 different languages across the country.

I have to just quickly add that we also did explainers. We realised that we needed to explain things in different languages very quickly. The government were requesting that information, so we started to distribute that across social media channels as well as on radio. There were 35 different explainers, but in all the different languages it was over 650 explainers that we produced over two years. It was highly crucial to try to get to those communities, and we hope that we can maintain some sort of level of funding to keep this going. That would be wonderful if we could.

**Mrs NICHOLE OVERALL:** And so it's not really only about crisis communications, as we've just heard from Distinguished Professor Macnamara. It's also about establishing trust and relationships and being able to have those connections in between times so that when crises do occur, they already know where to go. So there would potentially, I imagine, be the opportunity to continue along different lines, not just crisis broadcasting and news but potentially reaching out to those communities with general broader information that could be of use and purpose to them in between now and when we next face a difficult situation?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** Exactly, yes. In the system that we've set up for our national news to go to March next year, we've created a news bulletin board. I didn't put this in the submission because we were still working on it, but it's something I could send to show you. We're still sticking with our community spirit ethos and editorial policy. We're not talking about political issues, we're not creating adversarial issues, it's about safety for our community but we're providing them with news and information along those lines. The themes are national news, State news and Territory news, community health news. We will cover a little bit of politics because you can't get away from it but we keep it very mild. We will continue to do COVID news, some world news and we'll do First Nations.



We're trying to cover different themes so that people can continue to get information around those themes. We'll offer the opportunity for governments if a particular health issue comes along, even a transport issue where the buses are not running on a particular weekend. We can feed that information through our news service for journalists to pick up and play on their programs as well. We can have specific targeted information, in between, if there are any emergencies along the way, as well as general news. We created a trusted voice, as well, of our news service so if anything comes along then they know they can rely on us delivering that information to them.

**The CHAIR:** Are you also providing your news service to other community stations across Australia?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** Yes, because we were in Victoria, it was all Victoria with the funding. New South Wales was all of New South Wales. And with the national service, we will refresh our national journalists in Adelaide, Canberra, Queensland, yes, and the Northern Territory and WA. We will take it right across the country—and Tasmania, of course, yes. I don't know if you are aware of community radio and how it works but it's all localised community broadcasts. I can't just press one button, and everybody gets it. You have to contact the broadcaster, the station, and talk to them one by one. It is a slow process setting it up.

**The CHAIR:** But they do pay for news services, don't they?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** We actually pay them, yes. We have been able to employ about 56 people during COVID. We're not paying them high pay, we're just paying them like an honorarium to translate and produce, but they have been paid over two years, the people that have been producing for us, yes. We have writers, editors, about 50 translators, broadcasters, which are actually the broadcasters themselves translating it.

**The CHAIR:** I am just aware in my patch my community radio network sometimes pays for news services and I'm wondering whether they're coming to you to provide that, that's all.

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** That's probably a next step, yes. There are other news services where the station pays for the news service, and we have a community broadcasting service that provides that. But because of the pandemic we did it the other way around. Now how that rolls over the next year or two if we continue, I'm not sure exactly.

**Mr JUSTIN CLANCY:** Russell, just very briefly, I have two questions. Firstly, you touched on funding from the New South Wales and Victorian governments. Did you receive any Commonwealth funding? Secondly, did you get to interact directly with government agencies, say the Department of Customer Service, or was it more about taking media releases and then disseminating them? Did you get to link in directly with Multicultural NSW?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** First question about Federal funding; we approached the Federal Government but, no, they didn't fund us at all. The communication department do fund community broadcasting through a structure already, the Community Broadcasting Foundation, so they didn't deal with the emergency issues for us, so we didn't get funding through them. We did get funding from the Victorian Government and dealt directly with the multicultural task force that they set up. For New South Wales, yes, directly with Customer Service. We had direct engagement and I think for me, the big issue moving forward is how do you engage as a state government with people like us?

I think what happened with the pandemic is—I think other organisations have said similar things—that you have your agency set up that you communicate with through advertisement, through getting messages out, and when the pandemic hit, we were all caught out and we had to find different ways to deliver that information and respond quickly so how do you maintain that? My fear is that with all the good work that's happened how do you keep that going and, for me, it is about—we've suggested this to the Victorian Government—having an engagement unit where you have an engagement unit that tries to pinpoint the 20 best things, or 30 best things, or 10 best things that happened during this process, and then try to keep maintaining that in some way to keep that framework going. One of them for me was Customer Service, directly engaging with them around those issues. That allowed a lot of flexibility for how we do things, rather than being bogged down in getting commission on certain things a lot of the time.

**Mr JUSTIN CLANCY:** I have two follow-up questions to that one. Was Resilience NSW one of the organisations that you also connected with? I would also be interested in exploring how do you as an organisation measure your impact? How do you measure success from your perspective?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** We broadcast through community radio stations—not the station, actually. We go direct to the radio program. For example, let's say Mandarin in New South Wales and Mandarin in Sydney, let's say. The *Mandarin Program* will be at 2000. The *Mandarin Program* plays Monday to Friday every morning from nine o'clock. We were able to get our news on the *Mandarin Program* three times a week. They played it more than three times, but let's say three times a week on the *Mandarin Program* on 2000. We were

pretty sure that whoever was listening to that program we were getting the information to them. Through that week and through that month we will be able to get them a lot of COVID information.

The way we measure that is there is a community radio survey that happens every six months, every year. It's called McNair. It estimates that in an average month 60 per cent of the community listen to community radio. We think that during a pandemic, during a situation like this especially—that survey is done in English, by the way. Imagine if it were done with that Mandarin community. Their hunger for information, especially during COVID, is really high. They want to find out what's going on. They're listening to their local radio station. They're at home and they're listening to their language. We estimate that we were reaching between 50 and 60 per cent of the Mandarin community in Sydney through our COVID messages over that six-month period with explainers and news. Similarly with the Vietnamese. We take what the percentages are of the Vietnamese community and the Mandarin community, and 50 per cent to 60 per cent of those communities we were able to reach and have an impact with. Also, if one person hears the information, like an elder or a younger person, they pass that information into their community. The impact is higher if they get the correct information. So that's basically how we do our radio reach of information.

Our social media is a lot harder to estimate. If you look at what we were doing, we were distributing a lot of social media. All the news that we were producing for radio was going out every day on social media—on a Facebook page, Twitter, Instagram—and our explainers. All that information is up on SoundCloud, a digital platform, and on our website for people to listen to in the last three programs as well. So we had radio, we had social media and we had digital platforms that we were getting the message out to. We were also sending the explainers to government departments. They were distributing through their networks as well, through health departments.

For example, anecdotal information was that when our explainers went out, they were on a digital platform, and we were hearing that people were using them in a workshop. For example, if they were having a workshop with an Arabic-speaking community, they would pull down our explainer and play the explainer before the workshop to explain that particular information. It's hard to know exactly the deep impact of what happened, but it was right across the board that it was being used, as well as pretty sure covering 50 per cent to 60 per cent on community radio. So quite a high impact, I believe.

**The CHAIR:** I will pick up on one of the questions that Justin asked about whether you directly approached Resilience NSW and/or Resilience Australia. Those are two agencies that are now designed to make us better prepared for emergencies. Have you been encouraged to seek direct input with those agencies, Russell, to give us an idea to see whether they've been approached?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** That's Resilience Australia and who else was that?

**The CHAIR:** Resilience NSW.

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** No, I actually haven't, but I will now.

**The CHAIR:** I think this is a really important conversation to ensure that you're actually going to the right place to build up the resilience within our community, and this is all about that. What sort of funding are you looking at annually to keep things going the way they are?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** It's a piece of string, in a way, that question, because it depends how many languages we could have on air—like, if we have six languages or we have 35 languages. It's somewhere, and it depends if it was—ideally, what we would get is funding from different state governments, and then we are able to create a matrix and have a national news service. So I'm estimating between, say, 200,000 and 400,000, depending on where that money would come from.

**The CHAIR:** That's just like a cup of coffee being spilt. What you're saying has just been backed in by our previous witness in communication that there are even people from non-English speaking backgrounds, culturally and linguistically diverse, who don't even read their own language and radio is absolutely vital to the communication to those communities. I think this could be an important consideration in our deliberation and the finalisation of our report to make things better in the future.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Thank you so much for your submission and all the work that was done. I have a specific question. We heard on the last day of the inquiry that local services, particularly those in south-west Sydney communities, where the community services themselves were doing translations of the Government information because the lag time that occurred between when the Government information came out and then when the translations occurred was too long or the translations weren't done by native speakers. There were then concerns around how that translation was being taken or understood by the community. In an ideal world, do you see a role for your explainers and the communication that you're putting out there in addition to the translations

done by, say, the New South Wales Government, NSW Health, et cetera, or do you see that there's a value in the need for having the official communication, if you like, branded "New South Wales Government", et cetera, and then having other explainers that are for community radio that are through a community context? Do we need to be duplicating this or is it about making sure the right people are doing it once?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** That's a pretty good question. That's something very interesting about this whole process. I think official translations play a really important role, and our translations shouldn't start to undermine that official translation. I think they play an important role. I think this is where the Government was caught out. Normally when you do a campaign, you want to get the information out to a particular community, you set up a committee, you do your research, you do the right job, you translate it officially and you check it. It takes months and months and months to do that. I think that's really utterly crucially important to continue that process. I think what needs to happen in the future is to think outside that box, and what we did was outside the box completely. There's this new discussion now around community translation and how important that is because it can move quickly.

I'll give you an example in Shepparton. Many examples of this that we—and this is the trust that you have to develop in the community organisations to deliver the information. For example, we took a long time to get the trust of the Victorian Government and the New South Wales Government, but we got there. Then when scripts would start to be developed by either government, we would pick up the information. We would have to correct the English scripts because the English scripts were too complicated already, and then we'd get the script that we agreed on to make it "radio-ready", we called it. We would then give it to our translators, and literally overnight they would translate and create audio. We could get audio out the next day while the Government was still going through a process of putting an official script together. Literally, that would happen. We would beat them and their translation would be too late. Things had changed. We would adapt our audio and send it back again, so we could work really quickly. I have to admit that when we started I was really worried about this. Are the translations going to work? Is this going to work? And it has.

It's been incredible. Over the two years, we've made one mistake; someone put "house" instead of "temple" one day, about restrictions and the difference between a house and a temple during the restrictions—whether you should be at home or in the temple, or masked. What happened was, because we're a community organisation, we've got the information out there, the community responds really quickly if we make a mistake or do anything. There has been very little response. We are on Facebook. People can say things about what we put out there. Audiences—our broadcasters are known in their community. If they make mistakes the feedback comes to them, and we haven't received that—only that one time.

We were on a government WhatsApp group and someone said, "Hey, I think you've got this word wrong." We then quickly responded, got the information, rang up the translator, turned it around—within an hour and a half we had a new audio script back up and on radio, and apologised for it. The response we got from everybody—the 250 leaders on the WhatsApp group—was, "Thank you so much", because they know who we are. We're a not-for-profit, we're doing our best and they accept it. If the Government did that, you'd be on the front page of the *Herald Sun* saying you'd made a mistake and so on.

So I think there is really room for that community translation that should take place, because we know what we're talking about, we can make it radio-ready—not me, but the people that are doing this that have been producing radio programs for the last 10 or 20 years on their radio program every week. They know how to make it radio-ready, into speak that people can understand for their community. That's really crucial, to have that difference, I think, and that's what we could start to offer. I actually want to have a translation agency, when we get time, to come and evaluate what we've done and look at that work, and maybe—hopefully, in one or two months' time—I can have a report about that, about the importance of that sort of community translation in a time of crisis.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Maybe you should add the extra funding to fund the evaluation into your ask—because I think you could probably up your ask amount, given the response of the Chair to the cost.

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** Yes. Okay, I'll try to ask for more than a cup of coffee then.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** I'm not sure what kind of coffee the Chair's drinking but, yes, I get the point.

**The CHAIR:** Jenny, I take offence.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** I just wanted to ask one other question in relation to the impact on your team. I guess it's scaled-up significantly during this crisis. What kinds of pressures and strains did you see? Obviously, a lot of the people doing this translation work are also from impacted communities. Also, we've seen evidence of significant levels of increased racism and discrimination around COVID. How did you manage that in the extra burden and stress put on your team working in this high-pressure situation—and I guess, also, the social media

backlash and the communications that then occur, as there was a whole lot of tension happening? And are there other things that could be done, that we could consider in the context of recommendations around this report, to alleviate some of that burden and stress?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** It certainly was stressful. I mean, it was stressful for everybody. It's stressful going through the process. I suppose the lucky thing for us for the pandemic was that people were at home, and they had to set up a computer at home and a microphone and broadcast from home. So for them it was relatively easy because they could do it from home and they didn't have to have that travel. And because it's three times—Mandarin was three times a week, so they produced it from home—it's quite easy. The stress—the workload is incredible. It is still incredible, trying to set up a national news service again. It's quite stressful for all of our team and everybody involved. Also, trying to get people that understand our complex world of ethnic community broadcasting, it's really difficult. We can't just get somebody from the ABC, or you can't get somebody from commercial radio to come and work here; they won't understand it. So I think there are complexities in the structure and the make-up of it.

As far as our communities being impacted through racism, we haven't detailed all of that. I think the problems that we were trying to deal with—fake news, social media, racism—was by just delivering constant, reliable messages as much as we possibly could to try to counter that. I think an area which the Government needs to look at, which I think we couldn't get to all the time, is the social bubble. How do you get and break into that social bubble? We were able to find an Afghan women's Viber network. There were about 140 women there from the Afghan community, talking to each other on a Viber network. We were able to get a couple of news stories onto that Viber network. But how you pin down and get into that network to assist those people who are feeling that higher level of racism is still another step, I think, that needs to be taken.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** I will be very quick. Russell, thank you so much. It is Trish Doyle from the Blue Mountains. I love hearing you talk about community radio. I just wanted to thank you for your work, for sharing some of the lessons that you have learnt and for the incredible amount of people that you have worked alongside that those of us here can learn from. The importance of the audio format in crisis communications—is there something poignant that you want to share with us about that?

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** Definitely. You can't rely on written information at a time of crisis. I think that's the big challenge. If the Government is sending out messages, you will translate something and put it on a website, it doesn't work—well, it might work to a certain degree, but you've got to have diversity with your messages and layers to the messages. Only then it will work, except for the social bubbles—we still haven't got to that area yet. That is another layer. But when we need to be delivering messages to multicultural communities in different languages, you need that diversity in the messaging as well to try to cover across all of those things. We originally started as radio. We were just putting out the audio as news bulletins on the radio programs and then, "Can you do an explainer?" So we moved into audiograms.

In our submission, and still on our website, you will see audiograms. We became graphic designers. We create a graphic image, put the audio sound on that, put it on a digital platform and then find ways to distribute it on Facebook so that when people open a Facebook page, it starts playing. They see this nice image and it starts talking to them straightaway, so they don't have to read something. It is coming to them in their own language straightaway. They go, "We can listen to this." That is crucial for people from a multilingual or multicultural background. They rely on the spoken word. The community—they listen to their leaders. They listen to their neighbours, they listen to their community and their family. That is how they communicate fundamentally. The impact of influencing someone within those families through audio can influence that family, can influence that community. It is so much more fundamentally directed to those cultural groups.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** Thank you, Russell. It is brilliant, it is simple and I think it is a point that is worth making again. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for your time today, Russell.

**RUSSELL ANDERSON:** Thank you so much for this hearing and trying to keep all the good work that everybody has been doing through the pandemic going in some sort of ongoing framework so it doesn't get lost for all the good work that has happened for everybody.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**(The witness withdrew.)**

**Mr ANTHONY COOKE, APM**, Assistant Commissioner, Commander, Central Metropolitan Region, NSW Police Force, sworn and examined

**Mr WILLIAM MURPHY**, Deputy Secretary, Customer, Delivery and Transformation, Department of Customer Service, affirmed and examined

**Dr KERRY CHANT, AO, PSM**, Deputy Secretary, Population and Public Health, and Chief Health Officer, NSW Health, affirmed and examined

**Ms AMANDA STEPHINSON**, Director, Public Health (COVID-19) Communications, NSW Ministry of Health, sworn and examined

**Mr JOSEPH LA POSTA**, Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural NSW, sworn and examined

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. In the Government's submission it noted that community liaison officers in frontline services are critical to providing language support for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We've also had evidence that, when we got into the grassroots and started engaging with respected local leaders, the success in getting messages around vaccination and rules was a lot stronger. Who'd like to share some of those learnt experiences through what was a very quick-moving, fast-paced and difficult time?

**WILLIAM MURPHY:** Thank you. At the start of the COVID pandemic, back in March 2020, all the agencies got together and started regularly meeting about how we were communicating with the community and a range of specific communities across New South Wales. But it was really with the outbreak of Delta, in mid-2021, that we started to really ramp up the focus particularly on multicultural communities. We'd learnt the lessons of Victoria. So we had a daily routine, which was chaired by Department of Customer Service but involved NSW Health, Multicultural NSW, New South Wales police, Multicultural Health, Department of Education, Transport and others, where on a daily basis we shared feedback that we were receiving and insights from the community. The police MCLOs brought fantastic insights from the ground. Multicultural NSW engages with community leaders and religious group leaders across New South Wales, at those times, on a daily basis, bringing survey data back to that group. Obviously, Multicultural Health and the NSW Health system had fantastic insights.

At Department of Customer Service we also ran surveys. We received thousands of phone calls every day to our contact centre, which we were able to glean for insights about what was working for the community and what wasn't. We used that feedback collectively to focus on what were the key priority communications tasks for the community, hearing what was working, what wasn't working, what was confusing for the community and using that insight to respond on a daily basis. That was a very high rotation. I'd say it delivered great value for the community. We've decided to continue that practice ongoing. We're now applying that routine to responding to community concerns around floods and other crises as we go.

**ANTHONY COOKE:** I think, from a policing perspective—you spoke about community liaison and it sitting within the EM arrangements, specifically in relation to the Delta. We had a very difficult time early, but that'd been underpinned by communications between police area commanders, multicultural liaison officers within those commands, reaching out on a local basis, gathering information. That then stepped up into the structure that Mr Murphy's just described, which broadened the reach of those communications across the State of New South Wales, effectively, which meant that we were getting, I felt, the information out to a much more broader base in the community, much more quickly and much more effectively. The support, in particular, that Multicultural, NSW Health and Customer Service provided was that gathering of sentiment, which enabled not only comms strategies but also informed operational responses at times. I think it was actually quite responsive and very effective.

**KERRY CHANT:** I might just touch on a couple of things just to take us back. I think my colleagues can talk a lot about the coordination within the Delta response, but I would like to take panel members back to the beginning and just to let you know that, even in early 2020, we'd recognised the importance of CALD communities. We communicated through channels that we hadn't communicated through before, which is things like WeChat. We engaged intensively with the Chinese community and Chinese media. We were very concerned about stigma and discrimination.

We also recognised—I think this was something that Minister Hazzard particularly drew attention to or we became aware of—that sometimes the overseas language media would not attend mainstream media conferences. We did run a series of media conferences specifically targeted to multicultural media. That's been a theme that we've run even through the Delta outbreak and we continue it. Myself and my colleagues did one last week. I think that approach, recognising the diversity of the media and the importance to engage in different ways, will be something that will be a mainstay of our ongoing response.

We also used very early on in 2020 and literally in the January to March period—very early in the pandemic—assets we have within Health. We have a lot of health professionals that speak language and come from the community. We used a couple of our public health physicians that could speak both Cantonese and Mandarin—and also when Iran became a country of concern. We did recognise the importance of community engagement and, particularly in that early phase, I just recall the concerns around stigma and discrimination. We did all we could to mitigate that and really engender an understanding. My colleagues can speak—Joe, you might want to elaborate on the Delta response, which really exemplified the important role of CALD communication.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Thanks, Dr Chant. Chair Pavey, you're right. Fundamentally the community liaison networks across the whole of government were a key part of the response. Whether it's the multicultural community liaison officers from the police or the multicultural health network or our own community engagement team, I think the thing for us was that you can't build relationships in such difficult and challenging times. They have to be established in good times and then you have to leverage that social capital and trust. Our agency has been doing it for 43 years. As Dr Chant said, we had interpreters at the airport greeting people coming back from Iran in March 2020 speaking Farsi to help them—likewise with Italians and others. It just evolved. Delta was a game changer, absolutely. I think there are a lot of learnings for us all, particularly around the timeliness of information and the rapidly changing health requirements. But I think as a collective we tried to work as much with community and religious leaders as possible and really empower our respective community and engagement teams to give us frank and fearless advice.

**AMANDA STEPHINSON:** I'd just like to comment, echoing everything that has been said before—but really it came down to sharing insights across the whole of government and then putting those insights into action. As was mentioned, we met every day during the Delta outbreak, seven days a week, where we all came together and I provided the public health insights that were led by Dr Chant and the team and then the other agencies would bring all their insights. Then what we'd do is have action straightaway—and so start preparing the assets or, you know, even changing the way we communicated or the message we communicated if it wasn't resonating. It was a really iterative, ever-changing process.

**The CHAIR:** While you're here, because I think it's going to be, I hope, a recommendation—but I would like your input, particularly Ms Stephinson. In relation to the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council, we've just had a witness give evidence around that and how they were able to move very quickly and give a lot of information to CALD communities in a very efficient way and translated successfully. Anyway, they're scrounging around now for money to keep going. I think they're looking at around \$400,000 a year to keep this amazing network going. I'm seeking a sense from you in particular around how important that group was to getting the community messaging and translations to community radio stations.

**AMANDA STEPHINSON:** I think we used all media outlets really well and a lot of CALD outlets throughout. William can probably speak to the paid channels we used throughout the campaign. NEMBC was one of those. We used SBS but we used Arabic radio. We continue to work with all our media partners. I can't speak to the exact number that they would want to continue. As with all government communications, we do put a percentage towards CALD communications and their channels. But I think it's not just about the paid element. What this was about was community and stakeholder engagement. As Dr Chant mentioned, we do still continue those multicultural health press conferences. They are now held fortnightly, but they're also held as required as new health outcomes happen. It is also about inviting all different outlets there. There is a paid component but there is also just that journalistic component that we definitely welcome outlets like NEMBC to be part of.

**The CHAIR:** Did you want to add anything to that, Mr Murphy? I don't think they want to be so much paid, but it's about keeping the structure and 30 languages being able to be continued to be sent out during flood or fire or any other issue.

**WILLIAM MURPHY:** I think it's right to say that we did use all of those channels. We learnt a lot through this process. I think before Delta, as Ms Stephinson was saying—the Government has a target of about 7.5 per cent of advertising spend to be directed towards CALD and Aboriginal communities. Before Delta, I think that proportion was about 13 per cent or 14 per cent; during Delta it was about 29 per cent. We certainly redirected a lot of investment into those media channels to engage those communities, and organisations like NEMBC were really important to that. We worked with them to put together a series of explainers in language that people could download from their website.

Again, this comes back to the fact that we were hearing on a daily basis from the community that people didn't understand some of the messages. Working with organisations like NEMBC and others to get those messages into the right language and into the right places for people to hear them was critical. I think we're going to be embedding that sort of relationship and that partnering into the way that we manage communications going

forward for government, not just in crisis times but in other times as well. I'm sure the partnership with organisations like NEMBC has got a great future with us.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Jenny?

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Thank you so much, Chair. I feel like I could go for the whole time so I will restrain myself to a couple of questions, and maybe we can come back if we've got more time. Dr Chant, I acknowledge there were a couple of key points that I recognised in your introductory remarks around the issues of making sure that there is diverse communication from diverse voices. I remember watching a Chinese-Australian stand up and as part of the early morning press conference for the first time early on in the pandemic; I don't know if that was a conscious choice or it just happened to be a coincidence that that person was the right expert for the day to be speaking.

I guess I wanted to ask whether or not NSW Health has targets around ensuring diverse representation within the leadership groups and the roles and responsibilities within Health to ensure that the voices of diverse communities are at the table where those discussions and decisions are being made, as well as being able to engage with those communities? I wonder if you have any reflections on that. I think that representation matters—who is communicating the message and how that is being communicated. I will expand that to maybe Mr Murphy: On that group that you were talking about in that response, was there a reflection of the diversity of our community on that group, that is, culturally and linguistically diverse communities? Are there any targets more broadly in any of your agencies to require that leadership roles, or people who are in the room making the decisions, reflect the diversities of our community?

I guess then the second part around that, Dr Chant, if I may, is the communications coming out through Health and the translation. Maybe this also crosses over with Mr La Posta. Who is responsible for those translations? I appreciate the task was mammoth. I appreciate the amount of work going on and that the unpredictable nature of it was huge. But a lot of the groups that we've heard from have raised concerns about the delay in the timing of those translations and whether those translations were culturally appropriate for what was getting out there. I wonder where we see the responsibility, who sees that, what additional resourcing is needed and where it would be needed to be able to make sure that that's happening in a timely manner, given that crises are, by their very nature, unpredictable and we need to move quickly?

**KERRY CHANT:** I would just like to say that diversity in a workplace strengthens the workplace. It's really important we have a diverse leadership team. Within our public health system, we have public health units embedded in the communities. That adds additional strength because they're people that are working and in many cases living in those communities. We have recognised utilising the diversity in our workplace and growing diverse leadership as a key learning. We have a number of key leaders that represent different ethnic backgrounds or have been born overseas. However, we've got to do more, and I think we recognise that that will add strength. So, yes, part of it is a deliberate strategy to identify the talent and make sure that they're supported with both leadership opportunities but also with media and communications, and have that training to hand. But as I said, I think we were blessed with a number of spokespeople that we were able to draw on from the diverse communities, and I just want to acknowledge their contribution. They were obviously often thrown into a very uncertain area and having to communicate quite complex and unknown things to a community, and I just want to acknowledge their contribution. Yes, in short, I think this is an important component.

In terms of the translations, Amanda can probably speak to that, but I think there were some really interesting evolutions. One of the aspects of this is that we were actually prepared to do things differently. Some of the things that were really useful and effective were just actually doing quick videos where we would have skilled interpreters or people that were fluent in language but who also understood the content and the context. That's why using those public health practitioners that are actually understanding the content of what you're trying to do was really effective at then communicating to the community—because they could sort of understand the two sides of the coin.

We were prepared to recognise that sometimes translations were challenging. We also have to recognise that some communities don't read and engage with fact sheets, and so oral forms of communication were very highly effective for some communities. The ability to use technology—I think that we're increasingly aware of how effectively technology can be used, but also how we can also support younger people to support older people with information exchange. I would like to say that no idea was ever put in a too-hard basket or the wrong basket. There was a lot of trial and error, a lot of structured risk-taking and a preparedness to try new avenues, but I think Amanda can probably talk to some of the translation pieces.

**AMANDA STEPHINSON:** Yes, I think translations were divided between Multicultural NSW as well as through our own Multicultural Health Communication Service. We did try to divide a bit of the load to speed up the process. Any Health information would come through us, and any more government-type messaging could

go through Multicultural NSW. Both agencies have a really strong policy of not using any automated translation. That does add time, because we use NAATI accredited, and we normally have a two-stage process to verify that that information is translated correctly but also culturally appropriate.

I very much acknowledge that that does take time but, as Dr Chant said, we did try to amend the way we presented information. When we realised you'd get the 11 o'clock press release and then would have to send that for translation at that point in time—so you were already a bit behind the eight ball—what we tried to do was quickly do some audio and short key message grams, which we would record and get translated, and then they'd be able to be distributed to community through WhatsApp and other channels that were more readily used to get that message out. We'd still translate the full release, but acknowledging that that took a bit longer. It's those sorts of lessons learned that we will continue to put into practice. Joseph, you probably have more on that.

**WILLIAM MURPHY:** Would you mind if I just add to that, as well? Obviously the public health orders were being announced, and then there were legal instruments to be prepared. At the time, one of the things that my team does at Department of Customer Service is we run the nsw.gov.au website, which was the central hub for COVID-related information. As soon as a media release would go out from the Government about a new change to the rules or something like that, that would go up on nsw.gov.au straightaway. In the background, we'd be working with the legal team in Department of Premier and Cabinet to turn that into some plain speak that people could engage with. We were very conscious of the need for people from multicultural communities who didn't have English as a first language to get access to that information quickly. So in addition to the very quick turnaround social media sorts of assets that Ms Stephinson's referring to, we also had agreements with SBS and community broadcasters to do live reads on community-focused radio in up to about 60 languages so that within an hour or two we'd have that information in language in the communities for people to understand while those more complex human translations were being done.

We tried to get the information up within a matter of hours where we could and we hit that mark most of the time. Sometimes it was very late at night or very early in the morning, which took a little bit longer on occasion. So, yes, very conscious of getting those changes to the rules out through our own channels in that way, but at the same time we worked very closely with Multicultural NSW to leverage the community groups and the community leaders where we could provide some of those assets to them directly, which they could then share through their own channels with their own audiences. They were fantastic partners in getting the word out quickly when things would change like that, so that was very helpful.

Just coming back to your question about multicultural community representation in terms of steering the agenda for communications, while we had this meeting of agencies every day, one of the things that Multicultural NSW was able to facilitate was very regular forums—sometimes more than once a week for a while there—with the leaders of multicultural community media organisations, community groups and religious groups, which then gave us an opportunity to talk to that group about what was happening, what the plan was. I was able to talk through with that group what our plans were for getting assets out into the community through various channels, and we got fantastic feedback from that group in real time then about those plans and what might be more effective or what we could leverage, and we were able to take up those opportunities. So we had a very good dialogue going through those mechanisms that Multicultural NSW was able to set up for us.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Okay, but there was no requirement for diversity. There were no targets around diversity in any leadership groups and in any of your departments or agencies around either that steering group or others as it stands.

**KERRY CHANT:** Look, I think there are diversity targets across government, just as there are for Indigenous employment. It's just that I don't have them to hand.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Okay. Maybe you can take it on notice and everyone can get back to us on that. That would be great.

**KERRY CHANT:** Yes, but I just wanted to assure you that that's one of the key learnings, to cherish diversity. It adds to good policymaking and it assists in this remit; also, supporting people within our organisations that have that dual capacity to speak a different language and thinking about using those assets in emergency and crisis communications but having them well prepared to do that.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Great. Thank you.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I think, Ms Leong, you and I could talk about this stuff all day every day, and I think this pandemic's teaching us that we need to do more of it more regularly. So the conversation around cultural and linguistically diverse targets is very much live. So the Public Service Commissioner, Kathrina Lo, and I are very keen to look at the composition of the senior leadership right across the public service. I look across



other States and even at the Commonwealth, and I don't think we're there yet in terms of mirroring the community that we're here to represent. It's not just a New South Wales thing.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** No.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I think it's right across the board but interestingly we've just got some new data that's come out of our PMES survey, which is run right across the whole public service, and which goes to another level in terms of understanding things like culture, country of origin, cultural identity, language other than English at home—these sorts of things—which can then help inform exactly what you're talking about to make sure that the public service is on par, but then think about specific initiatives to help make sure the senior leaders within the public service can mirror the lived experiences of the communities they're there to serve.

Just around your translation point, I've gone on the record in saying that I am incredibly proud of the accuracy of the translations that happen right across the Government in New South Wales. So there were times where people referred concerns to us from other jurisdictions. They weren't ours. What I think is an ongoing challenge that you touched on is the cultural appropriateness of those translations because, if we use colloquial language or complex language, then it is very difficult to help get that message embedded within communities, and I used the examples in budget estimates of the Commonwealth Government's 'arm up' campaign when they were encouraging people to get vaccinated and how that message was completely missed by our Arabic-speaking community when you'd ask someone to 'arm up'. That's the sort of stuff I think government in totality needs to take as learnings. Pleasingly, our translations are a great example where the Premier and Minister recently announced more investment in Multicultural NSW to do exactly what you're talking about. Now if we get a document before midday, depending on the length of the document, it will be translated on the same day.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Thank you so much. Just to acknowledge that and the comment that you made, Ms Stephinson, around using audio and others, I wanted to put on the record in the context of this inquiry that one of the reasons that I was keen to initiate and suggest this to the Committee was as a result of seeing the suggestion that was made to the office of the then Premier Gladys Berejiklian around live translating the 11.00 a.m. press conferences. It was a conversation I had. I should acknowledge him—an amazing staffer called Jerome Boutelet in former Premier Berejiklian's office took a call from me when I said, "Why on earth can't this happen? Why isn't the New South Wales Government doing this? When I used to work at Amnesty, it used to happen in live time when we would have a global campaign meeting. Surely a global campaign meeting for Amnesty International is a lot less serious than what we're facing right now." The fact that there was such a willingness for people to take on those ideas and shift, and to see those translations take place, was huge. On that front, I wanted to ask all of you whether you saw the challenges around that sort of shift to audio and translation, and the delays around that, being just the pressure that everyone was under to try to adapt, or whether or not we could be seeing additional resources and support to improve that for future crises.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** I agree and echo your sentiments about Jerome. We work, and have worked, incredibly closely together because he was the former Premier's multicultural adviser and now works obviously closely with Minister Dominello and our ministry. I was having live discussions with James Taylor, who's the Managing Director of SBS in and around the time that we had a conversation with my former Minister as well. The irony is, Ms Leong, that's the first time in Australia that live interpreting has happened, or any partnership between a government and SBS to deliver that initiative, and it was a wonderful success—30,000 people on average a day, 10 languages. It was a massive operational exercise to stand up as quickly as we could. I commend James Taylor and David Hua from his team, and I also acknowledge the work of Janine Shamley from MNSW, working closely with DCS and others. They're the sorts of things in time I would love for government to have in its own in-house resources so that we can do these things and mobilise them incredibly quickly.

The irony of watching Dr Chant talk and then that being overlaid by a deep-voiced Arabic man and a fast-speaking Mandarin interpreter was, in one part, really humorous. But, in another part, particularly my own lived experience, it was an incredibly important part of sustaining the trust within communities, because they were able to hear it in real time and then able to share that information in real time, rather than waiting for the translations, the community forums or their local member to tell them what was happening.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** We heard from constituents that lived in Newtown that were working in south-west Sydney in emergency departments that they were using that to explain to people what was happening on the same day, because people weren't trusting the information. They didn't trust the English websites. So the emergency doctors were playing the recording to then explain to people, family members and others what was happening and the latest issues that people were facing. So it was working in the real world as well, at least from what we were hearing back. Thank you, Chair. I've taken a lot of time. I appreciate the indulgence of the Committee.

**The CHAIR:** Ms Melanie Gibbons, the member for Holsworthy, was next with her hand up. She was very involved at a grassroots level in supporting her communities. Thank you, Mel.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I wanted to also thank Dr Chant because we used her words to get out to our community very quickly, and she was obviously there every day. And Joseph, I think we met virtually a couple of times a week for a while there, with special Webexes with our African community and our different multicultural groups. Thank you for all your hard work. I know the hours you all put in. Thank you for that. I think thankfully there are live translations. The automated ones still have a long way to go. I'm following along with the closed captions here on Webex, and they're pretty woeful at this point. There is still a need for human intervention there. So thank you for all the work you've done there. I just wanted to know, in regard to your multicultural press conferences that you are still holding, do the media actually have to go in for those or are they livestreamed? Are our migrant resource centres able to access those and our other community leaders? Do they know that they're still continuing?

**KERRY CHANT:** I believe so. It is a partnership—Joe, do you want to take this one?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Mel, it's a really good question because one of the things that we work with Health and the Multicultural Health Unit, and Amanda and others is on the composition of who's turning up to the forums. What we try to do is not bombard community leaders where eight different parts of the government are going to talk to them at the same time because they will be talking about the 'thing' rather than doing the 'thing'. So what we have tried to do is help target the forums that Kerry and Dr Fizzell and others run to the multicultural media which has been a microphone out into the communities. And then, as you know, because you are at many of them, migrant resource centres, settlement providers, community leaders, religious leaders, those other forums that are about working more closely with grassroots and others will try to then share those forums. We are still running them with the Minister even weekly, albeit less so about COVID and more now around cost of living or Japanese encephalitis or other issues which are troubling communities to keep that two-way dialogue going. Yes, we try to steer them towards multicultural media in terms of the health forums, but they are not exclusive to the multicultural media. If a western Sydney migrant resource centre wants to jump on, absolutely they can but they are targeting media.

**KERRY CHANT:** If I can add just a small point there? Yes, we have been using them and we will continue to use them. They are held on Zoom. They are also shared on the multicultural health websites and shared on LinkedIn. They are pushed sort of broadly. We found them incredibly useful. One of the other assets is it allows us to bring other experts. Because often some of the multicultural radio or TVs might not have ready access to experts. For instance, we have done sessions on carbon monoxide poisoning, Japanese encephalitis, and last week we held one to discuss the new transition for the self-isolation orders and address community concerns.

I personally would like to acknowledge my colleague Dr Jan Fizzell who is known colloquially as Dr Jan. But it actually has been more than us talking to the community. You really get a sense from the questions asked about the concerns of the community. It actually strengthens your understanding of where the community is at. And so I see them as part of our routine business as usual, and I think that is one of the key aspects. One of my colleagues said it is really hard to build a plane while you are flying it. I think the more we can actually embed these learnings in our core base capacity, practice them and continue to use them for outside the crisis, it will strengthen our ability to really ramp up in crisis situations.

Certainly we have used them. The same mechanism with engaging with community around JE concerns. Dr Jan reached out to the Italian community around Griffith who had some concerns. What we find is that by early engagement you can actually settle issues really quickly and you don't get that escalation of concern in the community. Also, the community is feeling like they can reach in through Joseph in saying, "Look, I'm concerned about a significant issue, can you get us some health advice?" It needs to be that very nimble agile responsiveness, and I think that is what we need to do as business as usual.

**Ms MELANIE GIBBONS:** Thank you for that. I think it is important that it is not just the same old media channels, even though we are reaching into more multicultural media, but it is not just those same multimedia channels being utilised but it is also keeping those new networks with our multicultural leaders going so they are continued long into the future—those relationships are built on and that trust is built on long into the future. Thank you for your time on that.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** I begin by thanking each and every one of you, and your teams, for your work during tough times that haven't yet ended, and for being honest and willing enough to address some of the gaps. But, in the first instance, I want to thank you for all the good work that you all have done. I will turn to a point that you have noted in your submission, that sentiments around racism and discrimination were amplified by the pandemic, the fact that we have heard from a number of CALD communities that they felt that they were over-policed and subjected to harsher lockdowns during the pandemic, and that there was often a lag with

receiving or understanding information. This led to a lack of trust and had a bit of a negative impact on communications. There is a limited CALD community in the Blue Mountains, of course, but I recall hearing from a family communications described as "clear as mud" but, more so than that, the sentiment of discrimination. Full disclosure, my son is a police officer in Victoria. He worked very hard. I've never seen anyone work harder. What sorts of strategies can we develop from here from the learnings to address that issue of racism and discrimination and the way those communities felt?

**KERRY CHANT:** Throughout the pandemic, Health and all the other agencies have been really concerned about stigma and discrimination. In a lot of my portfolio areas it's one of the things that provides an intense barrier to accessing care. I'm very cognisant of it, hence the efforts. I want to reassure the communities that the actions were really there to protect the community. We can look at how we message that—how I talk to the community or how we address the community—about better explaining that. We have learnt a lot about communications in simple language and we talked briefly earlier on in this session about how we can do communication better. I think that's foundational going into any future crisis. There's not one silver bullet. It's really around us reflecting on all the aspects that we could do well but acknowledging that some of the things that were put in place we rapidly learnt and became very effective at reaching those communities.

I would also like to acknowledge the key role that the communities themselves played and how they helped us navigate the best ways to reach the community, and acknowledge the work of my partner organisations that were on the ground. As I said, there was no idea that was put in the too-hard basket. For me that's a great environment, where there was a real willingness to learn and adapt to use different mentalities. Reaching all segments of the community is often a challenge. As I said, I don't think I said no to anything, including TikTok videos to reach young people. We have to learn and take the lessons deeply. But throughout the journey we did many things with the community's support and guidance that have to be embedded in our future responses but kept as business as usual as well.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** Do the police want to make a comment on that relationship building, which is so important with communities?

**ANTHONY COOKE:** Absolutely. Your comments are well placed. We knew that there was that feeling in the community very early. We went out very clearly and very publicly to say, "Look, this is based on evidence and advice. We're chasing the virus. We're certainly not targeting people." That message didn't cut through all the time with all the people, and that's to be expected. As the process evolved, which evolved very quickly—my REOC, the emergency operations centre in south-western Sydney, so covering all those affected areas very early on, only commenced operation on 19 July. By 27 July we had had our first cross-agency meeting to determine the processes and get more information out. That's not to say it was not happening at the ground level to begin with. It did through the local emergency management committees, run by the police area commands. Our MCLOs, our multicultural liaison officers, did such a power of work, and had been doing such a power of work for quite a period before that.

Once we had collectively got together to drive broader messaging—and I must thank Joseph and his team there for getting us so much more access to community through our Webexes, which was more than several times a week, I would think, Joseph, early on. We had—correct me if I am wrong, Joseph—in excess of 300 people online at a particular time, which was important I think for community because they were able to ask us questions and give them answers. That's where Dr Jan became so important as well to drive that message to community leaders, who we were then asking, "Take this back to your community."

We had senior members of the Government and senior members of the pandemic response available and speaking directly with community, which I thought was very effective and which really did cut through to many of the communities and continue to build the relationships. Eventually, we had Jamal Rifi on 2GB reading in Arabic, I think, and it's the only time it had ever happened—so messages direct to the public. I think we achieved a lot. Can we learn from this? Absolutely. I think this structure worked really well. Joseph and myself and Amanda, we are all quite close colleagues now, which I think is a good thing going forward. I think that structure will survive any range of calls for support in terms of comms messaging to community from a policing perspective. It's very important in terms of assisting the operational response.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** Thank you for that. Just sort of playing the devil's advocate and throwing out to you some of the questions that have been put to me and friends—the helicopter surveillance, can you explain what that achieved?

**ANTHONY COOKE:** Can I just correct the record there? We didn't deploy the helicopter surveillance. There was one occasion in south-western Sydney where an aircraft returning from monitoring a public protest did address some people in a park in south-western Sydney. That was never deployed by me other than in operational

matters, because obviously I was still substantively the region commander. It was never deployed by me specifically for surveillance on COVID-related duties.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** That's good to have that noted.

**ANTHONY COOKE:** The fact that that was raised I understand, though, because in south-western Sydney, as you are well aware, the aviation branch resides at Bankstown and people quite clearly looked at it and assumed. Now, we very clearly messaged that in our Webexes with the public, but I understand how people did take that view.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** It's good to have that response for the record. Thank you.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** I just wanted to ask Mr Cooke: I'm guessing you don't have this information to hand, but it would be really great for the Committee to be able to have a sense of any breakdown you have on demographics on culturally and linguistically diverse community members who were fined. One of the things that I noticed very quickly in the media coverage, which added to some of the discrimination elements, was that I know for the first versions of the lockdowns that happened the first people who broke the business fines were people who were not English speakers. My guess is they didn't know that the fines had come into place, and then consistently it seemed like each time there was a change in the fining regime. In the penalties, it tended to be people who were not from English-speaking backgrounds who were the first to be covered in the news as to have breached those rules or to be covered in that way.

I wonder if you can take on notice the idea of providing any details you have on the statistical breakdown of the fines issued during COVID and how that relates to people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. If that information is not available, maybe suggest how we might be able to get some kind of indication of how that was flowing through. To me, I think that indicates how well the communication is working, unless we believe that those communities are more likely to breach the rules, which I don't think is the case. It's probably much more likely that they just didn't know they were breaking the rules. I think any details that any of the agencies can provide around that would be really helpful for the Committee.

**ANTHONY COOKE:** I will take that on notice.

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Thank you so much.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Through you, Chair—Ms Doyle, racism and discrimination sit firmly as part of the legislation, which I am responsible—and my team—for overseeing. I condemn any form of it, first and foremost. Abhorrent comments of people like the former President of the United States blaming the virus on a country were very unhelpful right across the world, particularly for our Australians of various different Asian descents here.

So you're navigating all of these things that you've actually got no control over in terms of those spokespeople abroad. I do have to commend the leadership and pretty much every member of Parliament in New South Wales, right across the board, for the way that they communicated really inclusive languages throughout the pandemic, because at no stage was it about a culture, or a group, or an ethnicity or a religion. That wasn't always the case within the communities, because unfortunately crises bring out the best and worst in us. We know that there are extremist voices at either end that use crises to try to accelerate their causes. Even this week, my social media manager said I've almost had a break from racism and hate on all of our multicultural profiles because it's all been targeted about anti-vaccination sentiment for the last six to nine months and we've brought out all the anti-vaxxers.

So I think what is critical—and this is just my view, but a national framework around racism is very, very important, and then the states can line up with that as best as possible. From my point of view, we have been looking to the Commonwealth to have that national framework around racism, so that the states could build in. I think it's unhelpful if each jurisdiction goes away and builds its own anti-racism strategy because I think it creates conflicting messages at times when you need really uniformed and strong messaging around these key threats to a cohesive and harmonious society. I am proud of the fact that our "Remove Hate from the Debate" campaign has engaged nearly three million young people, which is focusing on supporting people online around tips and tools to help diffuse what have been some really tense and at times dangerous scenarios.

I am really pleased with the relationships, particularly in the last couple of years, that we've built with the hate crimes division of police and others that if we are getting reports on this and we do think that they constitute a crime that we will refer them immediately to the police. Thus far, hand on heart, every single matter that we have referred to them, they have never been dismissive, they have taken them really seriously and they've allocated resources to support them. So I encourage you—to your community and to other members—that if you are seeing these things, please let us know and we will try to escalate them as quickly as we can to the police.

**Ms TRISH DOYLE:** Thank you for that.

**The CHAIR:** David Harris?

**Mr DAVID HARRIS:** Thanks, Chair. I wonder if you could talk for a couple of minutes for us about the difficulties of nuancing messaging to CALD communities in regional areas? We have heard evidence that a lot of people were taking information from relatives in the city or, in some cases, from relatives in other countries. That caused massive confusion because they were getting two sets of messaging. Have you had a chance to look at that in detail and what learnings have you found in that area?

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** You're right. So, I mean, examples where, tragically, it worked incredibly well and helped us in New South Wales was in my own community, the Australian-Italian community, when you had COVID ripping through northern Italy; likewise, within our Australian-Chinese community, after seeing what had happened firsthand, consuming a lot of it; and within our Australian-Indian diaspora, their willingness to be vaccinated after seeing what the Delta strain had done in their own country and those views that I think still sit with all of us and keep all of us awake in terms of the completely overwhelmed health system there and the class systems in action.

Competing with foreign media sources is incredibly difficult. Doing it with the brand of the New South Wales Government logo—and I often said to Will, "Not many people wake up in the morning and barrack for the New South Wales Government, as much as we'd love them to. What they will barrack for is community leaders and religious leaders that can help give that local source of truth."

So, yes, there were instances where what we were facing in, say, places like Sydney was different to what the community in Coffs Harbour was doing, but they're the same communities that are inevitably connected—whether they're African communities or Middle Eastern communities, Yazidi communities and others. So it was about making sure that the community and religious leaders in Coffs Harbour, in Grafton, in Wagga, in Albury, in these other areas had the relevant material and had access, more importantly, to the informed people within government to then make sure that they could then support. Dr Chant used the example before around some forums that Dr Jan ran in Griffith where you had a real community that had a heightened sense of anxiety and one forum was able to contextualise what the actual scale of the problem was, versus the media that all of us thought, "We're not even through COVID and now mosquitoes are going to be killing us." That's a key part of our challenge. I can't tell you that we fixed it. What I can tell you, though, is that we are mindful of the importance of having authentic relationships with community right across the board to help us in that journey to give them that source of truth.

**KERRY CHANT:** I would just like to say that I think also the local health district structure really assists us because the partnerships that are formed locally means that they have got those contacts into the local refugee service. They know where the local CALD communities are. They know the concerns and their nature. We also need to acknowledge that a lot of information changed through the pandemic. People from both CALD and non-CALD backgrounds really struggled with the different messages. There are probably a lot of learnings around messages and communicating uncertainty. I think I have reflected on basically saying, "This is what we are telling you now. It is based on the best information we've got, but things can change and we will let you know when they do." But how to communicate uncertainty when that is not something as humans that we like to embrace is another lesson learned. Just being clear that information will change, we will tell you and it is not because we got it wrong at a particular point in time; it is just because the situation has changed. I think that is particularly with the vaccine messages.

I would like to say that international connectivity and social media is a real challenge for us in responding to vaccine information. I think there are probably some learnings there. There has always been a concern about engaging with some of the anti-vaccination sentiment that you actually give it a platform. But, to some extent, social media has meant that it has already got a platform. I think some of the interventions that we put in place, particularly when there were things like fertility concerns or other concerns that really resonated with particular members of the community, we had to do a lot of work and identify those trusted spokespeople and the settings and venues for that information. But that's going to be a challenge for us communicating all the time in such a socially and digitally connected world. Amanda, I don't know if you want to add any reflections given you monitor—

**AMANDA STEPHINSON:** Yes, I think we could never prepare ourselves for the amount of bombardment we got, but we had a team monitoring our social media channels seven days a week until all hours. I think some of the challenge for us was also that we were monitoring everything else. We were looking at all of those other social media channels that other people are not on to see what the misinformation was and then trying to clarify that information. It might have been coming from overseas or from the anti-vaccination community. But, once again, it comes down to listening, hearing what people were saying and then making sure that was

reflected in all channels. So we would provide that to Dr Chant before her press conferences so she could raise that or through the multicultural forums through Dr Chant or Dr Fizzell. So making sure that we were all speaking with a collective voice and hearing those insights as it happened.

I think to your question around regional CALD communities, it is more challenging because there are smaller communities and, in some cases, different communities as well. We are seeing that change again with the refugee resettlement program. But, as Dr Chant said, we work with our local networks and community organisations. Down on the border we worked a lot with the Victorian health team as well. I think it was that collective action and realising that, once again, it couldn't all be written and some of it we did have to get in audio files, especially for those new refugee communities that spoke smaller language groups.

**WILLIAM MURPHY:** Can I just say that you absolutely hit the nail on the head there with the major challenge for us. Everyone who has spoken has talked about some of the frustrations that we had. Certainly there was misinformation being promulgated through those channels. But there was also accurate information from other contexts. New South Wales was not at the same stage of the pandemic as other countries were. People who were getting their advice from other countries that were at a different stage were getting advice that wasn't appropriate for their context. The same thing was happening in New South Wales where, at certain points during the pandemic, the rules were different for metropolitan areas than regional areas. So a one-size-fits-all message really didn't work for anybody in those circumstances.

That is when it comes back to working through our colleagues at Multicultural NSW; working through the local health districts, which are a very useful point of contact on the ground; and working with those community leaders. We managed to tap into those local community networks where we could get information out. As Joseph mentioned, not everybody is as big a supporter of advice they get with the waratah badge on it as others. With some of those community groups, it was an exercise of working with them to identify who are the influencers in their local communities that we could work with to help them have the information they needed so they could engage their communities in the language and the tone that was appropriate to their context and get a lot more traction on the ground, whether or not it came with a New South Wales Government badge on it, which was a very useful learning for us.

The other point, particularly through that period where we had different rules in metropolitan areas than regional areas—one of the things our team was able to do was set up the [nsw.gov.au](https://nsw.gov.au) platform so that, if you came to that platform from a regional area, different information was presented to you than if you came from a metropolitan area. While all the information was the same and it was all there, it was less confusing for you if you saw the rules that applied to you when you first came there. That was a learning that we're now trying to embed into all of the ways that we work—is to find a way to do that across multiple challenges.

**Mr DAVID HARRIS:** Yes, and it was made more difficult because my area, Central Coast, was part of Greater Sydney, which was controversial to start with. But our LGA is 196 square kilometres. So the staying close to home message didn't work when the rules actually said you had to stay within your LGA, which meant you could basically go anywhere. Yes, trying to communicate—

**Ms JENNY LEONG:** Meanwhile, I couldn't get across King Street.

**Mr DAVID HARRIS:** That's right. I will say that the anti-vaxxers seemed to have moved on to chemtrails and birds as drones now. So it is evolving.

**KERRY CHANT:** I'm sorry, I don't think the anti-vaxxers have moved on.

**AMANDA STEPHINSON:** I still have them all.

**Mr DAVID HARRIS:** I get them on a daily basis. Every time I put up anything to do with health, they pile on.

**JOSEPH LA POSTA:** Can I also just say, again, thanks to my team. We had over 700 one-on-one interviews, so qualitative conversations with leaders—many MPs connected with us, some here today—where we actually spoke to them in regular dialogue about what their level of awareness was around the rules and how connected their community was to the rules. The last thing we want to be doing is pushing more rules on people if they're completely apathetic to them—to then help inform the sentiment for police, for Customer Service, for Health, for others. That's an exercise that I'd only love to do more of in terms of that individual engagement. That requires, obviously, resources, but it was a wonderfully rich exercise for us to then help inform the whole-of-government messaging. Because sometimes the last thing you need to do is to push more on people when they're already overwhelmed.

**The CHAIR:** I think we're going to go over time. I am just going to declare it. We'll go to at least probably 12.15 p.m., because I know Justin Clancy wants to ask something and there is another set of questions I want to ask as well.

**Mr JUSTIN CLANCY:** Thank you to each of you for your work as well in your organisations. Just an observation in that regard—the ability as a local member to be able to reach out directly to you at various times was something that I found really important for my local community, so I was really appreciative of that. Going back to William's comments earlier on—and Kerry spoke the same about embedding learnings—for me, looking forward, that is a really important aspect. Kerry, you touched on that whole sense of embedding learnings by making it business as usual. I just want to explore around that aspect. Because for me—and I've touched on this with the previous witness—the importance of corporate memory. I am just wondering if there's a role there for Multicultural NSW across agencies of stress testing how we're connecting with our CALD communities. Just around that corporate memory and whether anyone is interested in exploring that a bit further, please.

**KERRY CHANT:** I suppose just to say we are now adopting the learnings as business as usual—so we've had a couple of exemplars and Amanda can speak to this as well. For instance, Japanese encephalitis—I spoke briefly about the Italian community in Griffith. But also we're obviously doing a Japanese encephalitis vaccine rollout in the affected communities along the border. Then we're also looking very much at a mosquito avoidance campaign. CALD people are at the centre of that campaign and we're then using the networks that were established as part of the consultation group on the creative. We've raised these issues through the community groups and I would anticipate—and we're just speaking outside the fact that our ongoing involvement with Multicultural Health and Multicultural NSW will be part of what we do regularly and just getting the frequency of all of the regular meetings that we need to have.

But it is about having those avenues established and making them real—making sure we're responding to the concerns of the community as they change so that those platforms are still in existence. Dr Jan is more from responding to the COVID concerns of the community to things like messaging around chronic disease prevention and cancer screening. But it is about having those platforms there and nuancing them to respond to the community's concern but also having an avenue for us to raise issues with them. I think it's across the board we'll do a reset but, for me, they are so valuable. Amanda, did you want to say anything there?

**AMANDA STEPHINSON:** Yes, I think we've done a lot of work, particularly in the last month or so, on documenting everything with what went well. We work really closely with the Department of Customer Service to record what paid channels worked and then also what unpaid channels worked. We're continuing a number of the initiatives but we're also noting the others that we might want to use in future crises. One of the benefits we had throughout the pandemic was having the Multicultural Health Communications Service embedded within our team. They were fundamental to the success of the communications with CALD organisations and individuals. That group is still working very hand in hand with the broader health communications team. I think it's just continuing some things but, to your point, documenting others that might work in crises. As we've documented all those, we'd be more than happy to share our learnings with Multicultural NSW if they are wanting to do a more global, whole-of-government approach as well.

**The CHAIR:** In wrapping up, I suppose as a member of Parliament—I'm not talking about a political member of Parliament but just as a leader in our communities—I do think, listening to and having conversations with other members of this Committee, there is a role, formal or informal, with us to be able to understand what is going on in our communities. I think that in any recommendations I'd encourage that to be embedded in your thinking.

I know even if I go to the North Coast of New South Wales from the mid North Coast, people are still grateful for the daily messaging I was able to reach with the tens of thousands of people that read my Facebook and was shared. I know that we did make a difference in my office and myself working with our Indigenous community, which in some parts of my community is 10 per cent, when they were getting those crazy anti-vax messages. It was weeks and weeks of work to get those vaccination rates up, and we were very proud when we did. I just think there is an important role for us to play, in a very non-political way, in having those relationships with our local health districts. I just reiterate that. Mel Gibbons, that was an issue that you had spoken with me about. Is there anything you wanted to add to that? No, it seems not. But I think the quote of the day came from your colleague: "It is very hard to learn to fly a plane as you are making it." It was just the most extraordinary period and we genuinely thank you all for your work.

**(The witnesses withdrew.)**

**The Committee adjourned at 12:08.**