



Communities at the centre

Insights from
the Multicultural
Resilience Project



About VCOSS

VCOSS is the peak body for Victoria's social and community sector, and the state's premier social advocacy body.

We work towards a Victoria free from poverty and disadvantage, where every person and community is supported to thrive. We work relentlessly to prioritise wellbeing and inclusive growth to create prosperity for all.

We achieve these goals through policy development, public and private advocacy, supporting and increasing the capabilities of the state's social service bodies, forging strong coalitions for change, and explaining the true causes and effects of disadvantage.

VCOSS's strength comes from its members and the people they serve. Our members include frontline service groups, peak bodies, advocacy organisations and individuals passionate about a fair, sustainable and inclusive Victoria.

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Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners.

VCOSS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country, and pays respect to Elders past and present. Our office is located on the sovereign, unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people of the Kulin nation.

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Executive summary

Following the devastating floods across Victoria in October 2022, VCOSS initiated the Multicultural Resilience Project. The aim was to support multicultural communities across the north and north-west of the state to continue to recover, rebuild, and strengthen resilience in preparation for future disasters.

Using a co-design approach, VCOSS partnered with four local multicultural community organisations in Mallee, Shepparton, Wodonga and Wangaratta. The idea was for communities to take the lead and co-design a resource to address a pressing and locally-pertinent issue related to emergency management, public health, and/or disaster resilience.

From developing health advocacy training with seasonal workers in Shepparton to creating an emergency management 101 video for newly arrived families in Wodonga, each solution developed is completely unique.

But there are some common themes and learnings across all four projects.

Government and services need to continue to listen to and work alongside communities. People know what they need and what works best for them. They have strengths, experience and insights to share. The best solutions are those that come from within communities.

Multicultural community organisations and leaders play a critical role in supporting their communities before, during and after emergencies. Whether it's brokering relationships with authorities, sharing in-language information via WhatsApp, providing culturally safe material aid, or supporting people to access services, they do life-saving work.

Partnerships that allow information, insight and experiences to be shared between multicultural communities, services and government are crucially important. Partnerships need to be ongoing, and properly resourced, so they operate not just when there is an emergency, but all year round, year after year.

To invest in preparedness, long-term recovery, and resilience with multicultural communities, VCOSS recommends government and authorities:



Build trusted relationships

1

Invest in engagement activities that foster social connection and build relationships between communities, services and authorities.

2

Establish and fund ongoing forums for collaboration between multicultural community organisations and emergency services at a state and local level.



Co-design communications

3

Train multicultural community organisations in emergency management messaging and provide funding to enable them to lead the dissemination of information to their communities.

4

Fund community projects and partner with community organisations to co-design resources for and with multicultural communities.



Enable community-led, place-based support

5

Involve multicultural communities in the planning and design of relief and support services.

6

Fund multicultural community organisations to provide culturally appropriate and accessible services for their communities.



Ensure sustainability

7

Provide ongoing funding to multicultural community organisations so they can build and maintain their capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from escalating disasters.

About the Multicultural Resilience Project

In October 2022, Victoria experienced one of the most devastating flooding events since colonisation. Communities in northern Victoria along the Campaspe, Goulburn, Loddon and Murray rivers were amongst the worst affected in the state.

Many of these regions are home to significant multicultural communities – some of the largest in Victoria, outside of Melbourne. Recognising disasters don't impact everyone in the same way, and there is strength in partnering with diverse communities to rebuild and recover, the Multicultural Resilience Project was initiated to:

1. support regional multicultural communities to continue to recover from the floods;
2. enhance the disaster recovery capacity and resilience of multicultural communities; and
3. continue to strengthen partnerships between local multicultural communities, government and emergency management agencies and organisations.

This project built on past work undertaken by VCOSS and the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) to strengthen partnerships between multicultural communities, the government and emergency management bodies, with a particular focus on the COVID pandemic.

The project took a co-design approach, with VCOSS partnering with four community-based multicultural organisations to develop resources that help people prepare for, respond to, and recover from the floods and other disasters. Each organisation chose a challenge that was pertinent to their community, leveraged their unique strengths and designed solutions that best meet their needs.

This report highlights the common experiences, challenges, strengths and needs of regional multicultural communities during and after the October 2022 floods. It documents the co-design approach undertaken in partnership with local multicultural organisations to deliver community-driven solutions to some of the pressing issues they face. We reflect on the learnings from the process for communities, organisations and agencies who want to co-design resources for public health, wellbeing and disaster resilience. Finally, we draw attention to the systemic issues and proposed government responses to improve disaster resilience for all Victorians.



Victoria's regional multicultural communities

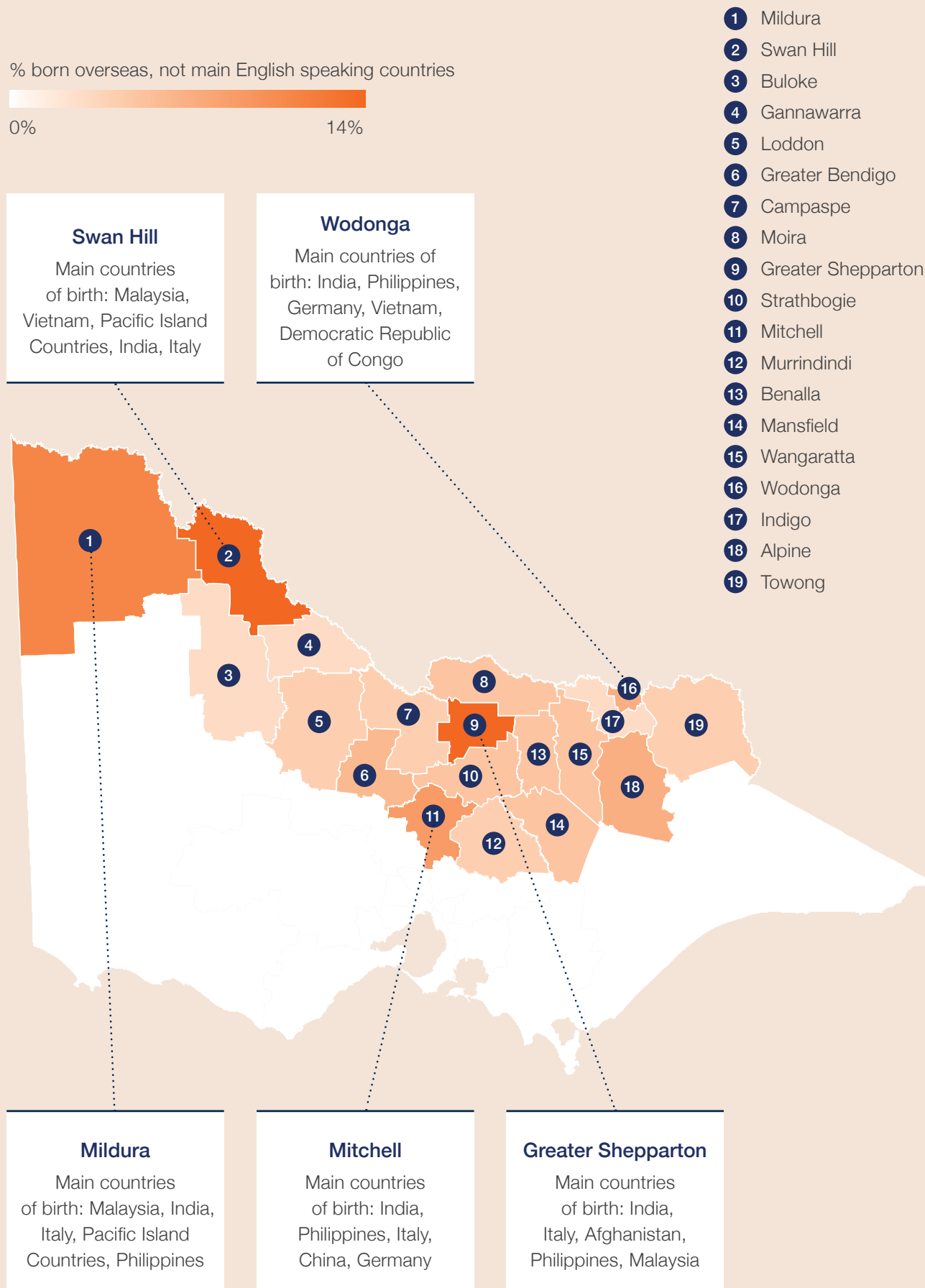
Strengths, challenges and opportunities in disaster resilience

Many areas across north and north-west Victoria are home to culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Each place is unique. Regional centres such as Mildura and Shepparton are hubs for humanitarian resettlement, and hence have growing communities of newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers. Seasonal workers, many of whom are on temporary visas, reside in agricultural areas in and around Mildura, Robinvale, Swan Hill, and Shepparton. Other areas, such as Wangaratta and Alpine, are home to older people, some of whom have lived locally for decades.

Every community has specific strengths and challenges, and each was impacted by the floods in different ways. Nevertheless, common themes emerged in our engagement with people and services across the state.

Figure 1. Cultural and linguistic diversity across north and north-west Victoria



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census, accessed 14 February 2023



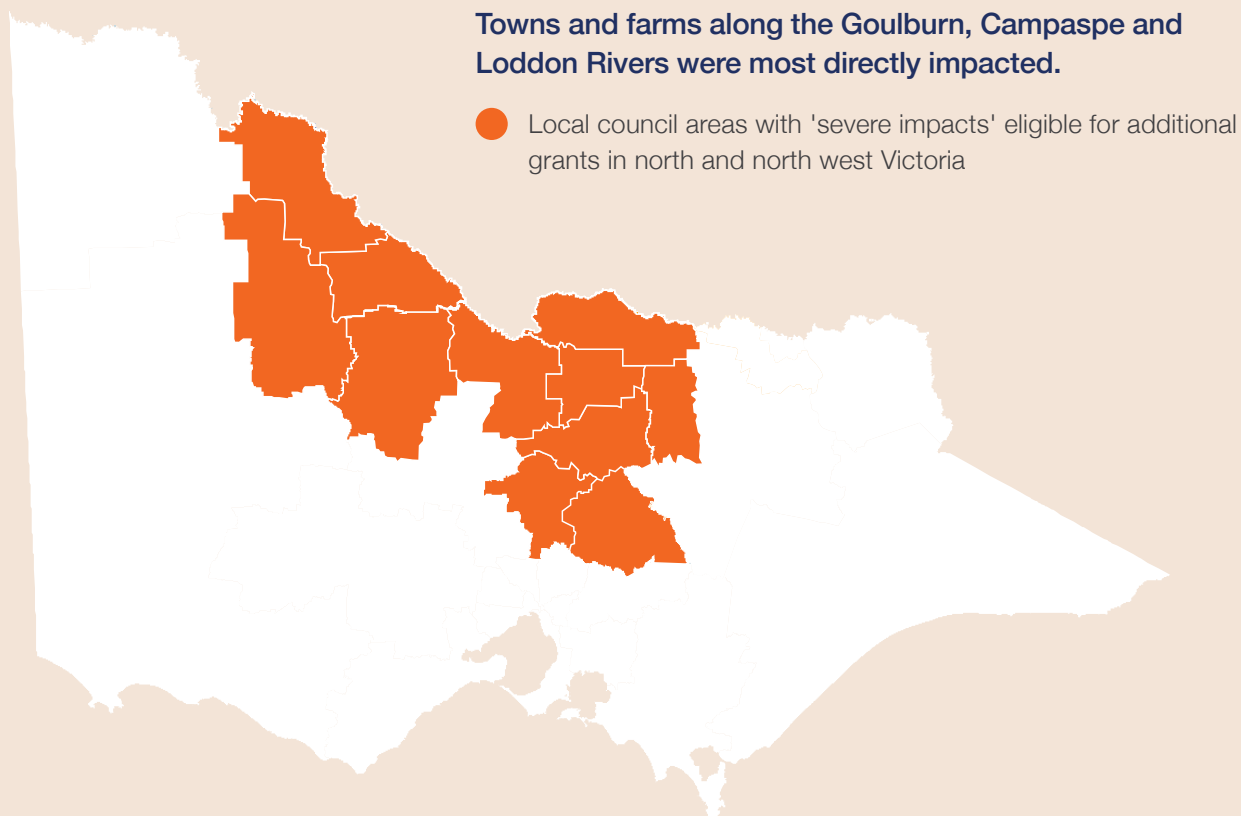
The impact of the floods

The impact of the floods across north and north-west Victoria was varied. Some areas experienced significant direct impact in the form of large numbers of homes cut off or inundated and extensive property and infrastructure damage. Across the state approximately 35,000 homes were impacted, and the SES received over 16,000 calls for assistance.¹

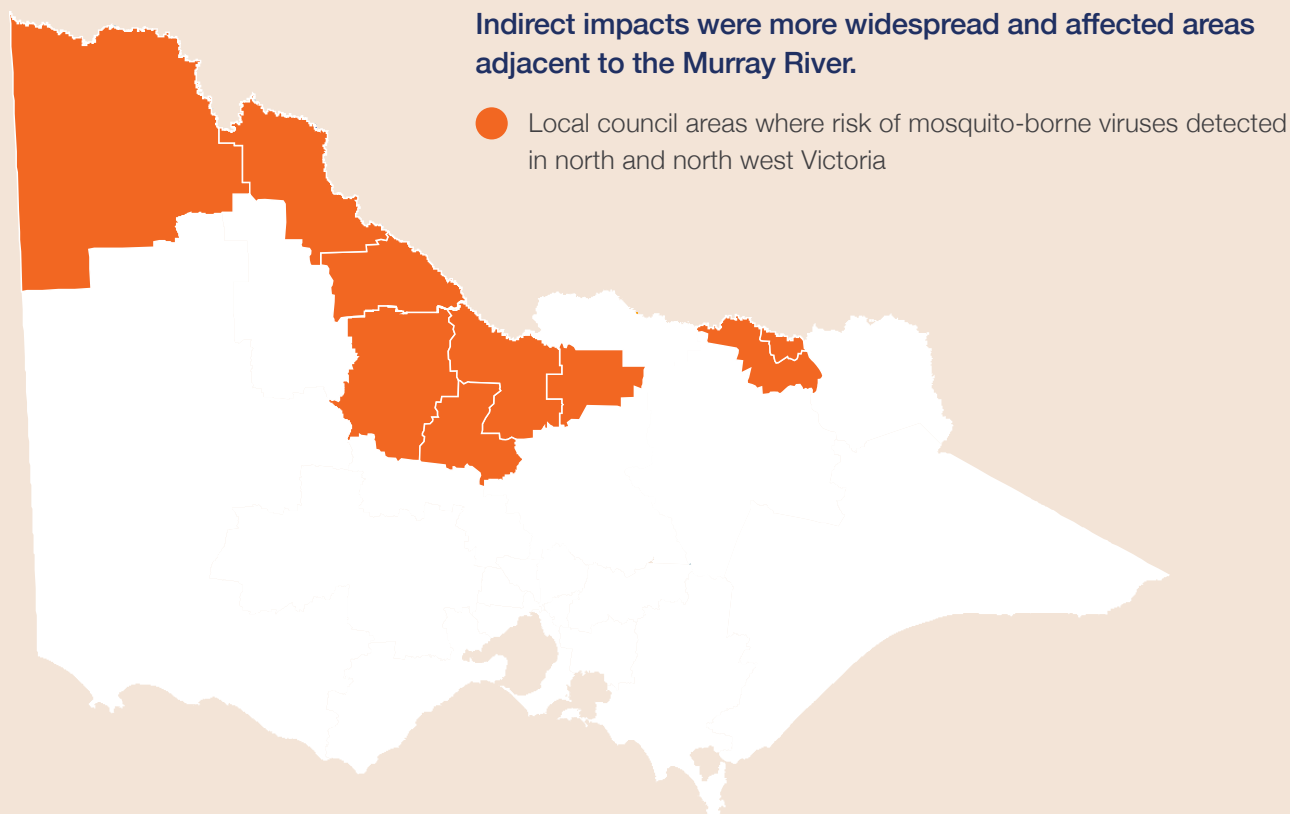
In areas where the impact was less direct in terms of damage to homes and property, people reported other effects that were particularly acute for multicultural communities. These included:

- Stress, trauma and mental health issues
- Disruption to work and loss of income (particularly for agricultural workers)
- Food insecurity
- Exposure to contaminated water
- Exposure to mosquito-borne diseases
- Living in overcrowded or unsuitable housing

Figure 2. Direct and indirect flood impacts across north and north-west Victoria



Source: Victorian Government, Emergency Funding Management Programs, 2023, <https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/resilience-and-emergency-management/emergency-recovery-funding-programs>, accessed 30 April 2023



Source: Victorian Government, Mosquito Surveillance Report, 2023, <https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/resilience-and-emergency-management/emergency-recovery-funding-programs>, accessed 30 April 2023

The critical work of multicultural and community-based organisations

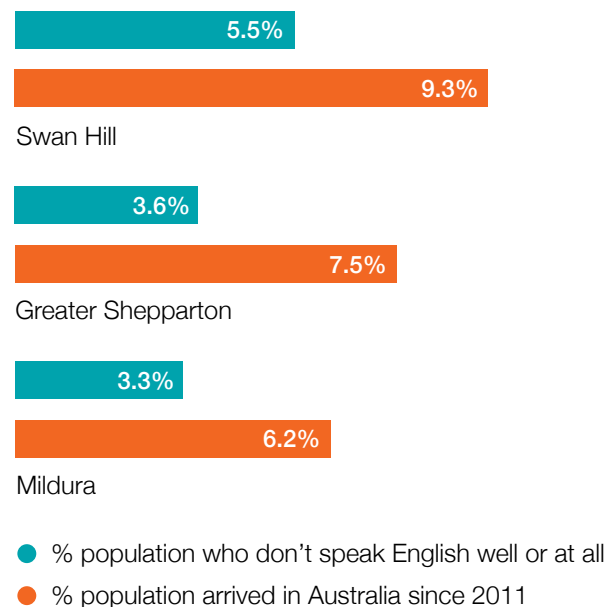
Multicultural community organisations, such as regional ethnic community councils (ECCs), migrant resettlement services and grassroots cultural groups, played an essential role in supporting communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from the floods.

Multicultural community organisations across Victoria formed strong, trusted relationships with community members during Covid. These relationships meant that they knew who needed support and what they needed in the floods. Before, during and after disasters they perform the critical functions of brokering relationships between communities and authorities, translating, adapting, and disseminating important communications and offering practical material aid.

Relationships between multicultural communities and authorities

Communities' connection to government and emergency services is critical during disasters as it facilitates the sharing of information and resources that enable preparedness, response and recovery.² Through our engagement, we heard that authorities have historically not engaged well with multicultural communities, leaving them isolated from sources of knowledge and support. Awareness of risks, and familiarity with and trust in services is often lower amongst people who are newly arrived or who don't speak English well.³ A consistent theme we observed is that some people – particularly those who may have arrived in Australia more recently – may be scared of authorities and their uniforms.

Figure 3. Areas with a higher percentage of people arrived recently or who don't speak English well



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census, accessed 30 April 2023

2 Antoine Chandonnet, *Emergency Resilience in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities: Challenges and Opportunities* (The Australian Red Cross Society), January 2021

3 Ibid

To counter this, partnerships have been established between multicultural community organisations and mainstream agencies including the CFA, SES, local councils, and local public health units. These partnerships enable messages to be shared through networks, and trust and familiarity to be built between services and communities. Information sessions (some run in-language with community groups) have so far been effective in making sure people have basic information about risks and what happens in an emergency.

The CFA and SES are also doing community engagement to build familiarity and trust. Multicultural volunteers and liaison officers could also help overcome this issue. For example, a majority of new SES volunteer recruits in the Swan Hill area are of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Case Study



Sunraysia Multicultural Emergency Response Group

“The Sunraysia Multicultural Response Group was formed by the Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council in early 2022. Our aim was to improve Covid-19 and other emergency responses and reduce the disproportionate health, economic and social impacts encountered by multicultural communities in the Sunraysia region. We did this through community-led and locally based initiatives and culturally responsive engagement with multicultural communities.

The group is made up of community leaders from 12 different cultural groups and meetings were attended by representatives from emergency services such as Mildura Police, VICSES Mildura, AMES Australia, Mildura Rural City Council, Loddon Mallee Public Health Unit, Mildura Life Saving Club, Country Fire Authority, and others.

Meetings enabled information flows between government, local service providers and leaders representing communities, and for community advice to be valued and used in the implementation of key initiatives.

The SMRG was developed with support from the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria’s Multicultural Regional Emergency Preparedness and Response Program, which was funded by the Victorian Government.”

Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council (SMECC)

Communication

Communication during emergencies is often aimed broadly at the general public.⁴ This blanket messaging doesn't effectively reach all multicultural communities. Information often isn't translated into the required languages, and if it is it may not be understood by community members as it assumes a level of existing knowledge, includes unfamiliar concepts or culturally inappropriate terms.

Multicultural community organisations perform an important role during emergencies, translating, adapting, and disseminating messages to their communities. Some organisations and leaders are creating in-language video and audio content that is shared via social media. Others have distributed everyday items like fridge magnets with essential details on them.

“Our community use social media to find out information. During Covid, SMECC started a WhatsApp group for Malay speakers. There are 160 people in this group and growing. The group was designed for sharing credible and reliable information, in language. I have volunteered to translate vital information from Covid and times of flood through this WhatsApp group.”
 Flora Walter, Leader in the local Malaysian community, Mildura

Figure 4. AWECC interpreter and emergency contact card (left); image from AWECC information video (right)





Culturally safe and accessible relief

Multicultural communities can also face barriers in accessing relief services and material aid. Language barriers can mean some people are unable to navigate access to the services they need or apply for financial assistance. Relief centres also may not offer culturally safe care, for example sleeping quarters may not be segregated by gender, there may not be prayer spaces available or cultural dietary requirements may not be catered for.

Multicultural community organisations step in to fill this gap by providing food and material aid to community members, organising for volunteers to act as interpreters, and advocating for community needs to be recognised by authorities. In the aftermath of the floods, food was often a gateway for building trust and having conversations about other needs and services, which bicultural workers and volunteers were able to refer people into, often going above and beyond to help and support.

“When the floods came we already knew who to call. We knew what they needed. We ended up setting up our own marquee and that became a drop-in. We were accessible and we were just there. You could just come down walk out with what you needed.”

Betul Tuna, Executive Officer, Point of Difference Studio



The challenges faced – new, emerging and existing

Despite the strengths demonstrated by multicultural organisations in supporting their communities, there were challenges. Organisations reported that many issues, which were present before, were made worse by the floods. Even if people were not directly impacted by the floods, areas of need such as housing, food security, mental health, access to healthcare and resolving visa status require more resources and focus.

Housing

Organisations reported issues around housing that were exacerbated by the floods. There are many people in overcrowded or unsuitable housing. People were not aware of their rights and responsibilities if their rental properties were damaged and some experienced racism when applying for housing.

Mental Health

There is a significant and ongoing need for mental health support as services are not always available when and where they are needed. Stigma about mental health, and a lack of culturally responsive and in-language support, created additional barriers for multicultural communities.

Language barriers

Despite some progress, organisations reported that information was not immediately available in the right languages, and there were significant delays in getting translations of key documents prepared and disseminated.

Interpreters were not always available or used by services when they were needed. Community members reported not being able to communicate effectively and have their needs met in a holistic, respectful and timely manner.

Health risks and access to health care

There were numerous health risks associated with the floods that some multicultural community members were not aware of or supported to deal with. Organisations reported that people came into contact with contaminated water and got sick. People were also reluctant to seek health care due to fear of authorities and concerns over costs. This led to health issues reaching a crisis point, and in a few concerning cases resulted in deaths that were possibly preventable. These incidents had profound and lasting ripple effects on families and communities.

Cultural safety of services

Local agencies are not always equipped to work in a culturally safe way with culturally and linguistically diverse clients. Community leaders, bicultural workers and volunteers in grassroots multicultural organisations often act as mediators to support the process. This may involve supporting community members to access and navigate services, completing forms, accompanying people to appointments and acting as translators and advocates.

We consistently heard stories about people going above and beyond to support their community. In the case of disasters where multicultural leaders, volunteers and staff may themselves have been affected, there is a risk of exhaustion and burnout if they are not adequately supported.

Case Study



Theresa's Story

"I will tell you a sad story of one of my dear friends..."

This is the story that the community has come to know. He was a gentleman from Robinvale who went to the hospital, supposedly with chest pains. He tried to describe to the triage nurse what his symptoms were, and the triage nurse asked a few questions. The man was a bit hesitant to answer or did not properly understand. He was asked if he had a Medicare card, which he did not have. He was told that it would cost him money to be attended to. He walked out the door and told his friend to drive him back home.

He was still feeling unwell when he got home. The next day, his friend came to pick him up for work, but he was a bit sluggish and slow, so they decided to sit and have a break. He grasped his chest, fell over backwards, and had a major heart attack and unfortunately died. The community rallied together and fundraised about \$15,000 to send his body back home. This was in the peak of Covid.

What do I want you to learn from this story? That most Fijians shy away from emergency services when met with lines of questioning and probing. I suggest that if you do not need to ask certain questions, whether it be about visas or other documentation, then do not ask. That person should have been treated first, and then asked questions later or informed later about the circumstances that he was in... I think then we would have had a better result."

Theresa Ah Koy-Ketting, President of the Mildura Fijian Community Association

Seasonal workers and temporary visa-holders

There are approximately 34,000 workers on temporary visas across regional and rural Victoria.⁵ Many work in agriculture, arriving through the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) Scheme. Numbers fluctuate seasonally, but as of June 2023, there were approximately 7,000 PALM Scheme workers in Victoria.⁶

Seasonal workers and other temporary visa-holders face additional challenges including ineligibility for supports, uncertainty over rights and entitlements, inadequate housing and workplace hazards.

Many temporary visa-holders do not have access to Medicare and rely on private health insurance. Barriers such as the complexity and limitations of insurance schemes, lack of providers in regional areas, and fear of authorities mean that people delay or avoid seeking essential healthcare. This can result in serious long-term health impacts and even deaths.

These are critical issues that require greater attention from both the state and Commonwealth governments.

Partner organisations on this project, SMECC and Point of Difference, support seasonal workers across the Mallee and Greater Shepparton areas. Pacific Islander (Pasifika) communities are a prominent group, many of whom are newly arrived. There are also many seasonal workers from Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia.

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Temporary Visa Holders*, 2021. There are 47,000 temporary residents in regional Victoria, of whom an estimated 73% are in the labour force (either employed or unemployed, based on the national average).

6 ABC Rural, '*Pacific farm workers welcome reforms as numbers reach record high*', <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2023-06-19/pacific-australia-labour-mobility-palm-scheme-changes-welcomed/102477350>



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Building on strengths

Co-designing solutions with communities

The solutions lie within our communities – Samoan Proverb

Multicultural community organisations and communities themselves have significant strengths to offer in addressing the challenges they face during disasters. On this project, VCOSS undertook a co-design approach, partnering with local organisations to identify and respond to a challenge that emerged for their communities during the October 2022 floods.

What is co-design

Co-design is a collaborative design process that uses creative and participatory methods to collectively define the issue or issues to be solved and to then innovate the solutions. The approach has its roots in design techniques developed in Scandinavia during the 1970s. In recent years, it has been adopted globally in the public and social sectors to aid the development of policies, programs, services and design outcomes. It is particularly effective when dealing with complex issues and where there are multiple stakeholders or needs.

Benefits of co-design

The main benefit of co-design is the centring of those who have personal and professional experience of the problem as the experts. This allows for innovation in finding solutions fit-for-purpose.

Other benefits of using a co-design approach include:

- Surfacing underlying issues that may not have otherwise been identified
- Generating original ideas that better address the issue or issues
- Improved understanding of communities and their needs
- Testing ideas or concepts early in the process and working iteratively to refine solutions
- More efficient decision-making
- Higher quality outcomes that meet the specific needs of the end users
- Better buy-in and uptake of solutions
- Transparency of process, leading to better trust with communities
- Setting the foundation of ongoing relationships.

Our journey

Through research and conversations, VCOSS identified four local partner organisations that are deeply embedded in their communities, and were already working in emergency response and resilience.





All four organisations have different geographic coverage and focus on different communities. NEMA supports a large community of older migrants who are geographically isolated, such as those in Alpine Shire. POD and SMECC work with similar communities including seasonal and undocumented workers who often cannot access mainstream supports. AWECC supports newly arrived migrants and refugees such as those from the Democratic Republic of Congo, amongst other diverse communities in the region.

Eleven staff from the four local partner organisations were trained in co-design approaches. Sessions were held online and in-person in Wangaratta and Swan Hill. The high-level objectives of the three training sessions were:

- Session 1 – Introduction to co-design, covering definitions of co-design, design thinking principles, power, trauma and an experience of a design challenge
- Session 2 – Planning co-design workshops, covering content on workshop facilitation, specific co-design tools and time for community organisations to begin planning their workshops
- Session 3 – Presentation of co-design workshop plans for feedback and discussion

In addition to training on content, there was an aim to build trust and relationships between the people and organisations. Many of the local partner organisations were working on similar issues and so began to share knowledge and resources with each other.

Figure 5. The Multicultural Resilience Project Journey





Following the training, the local partner organisations facilitated two workshops with their communities to design resources in response to their chosen issue. The issues were chosen to enable organisations to build on their existing work and to meet the most pressing needs of their communities.

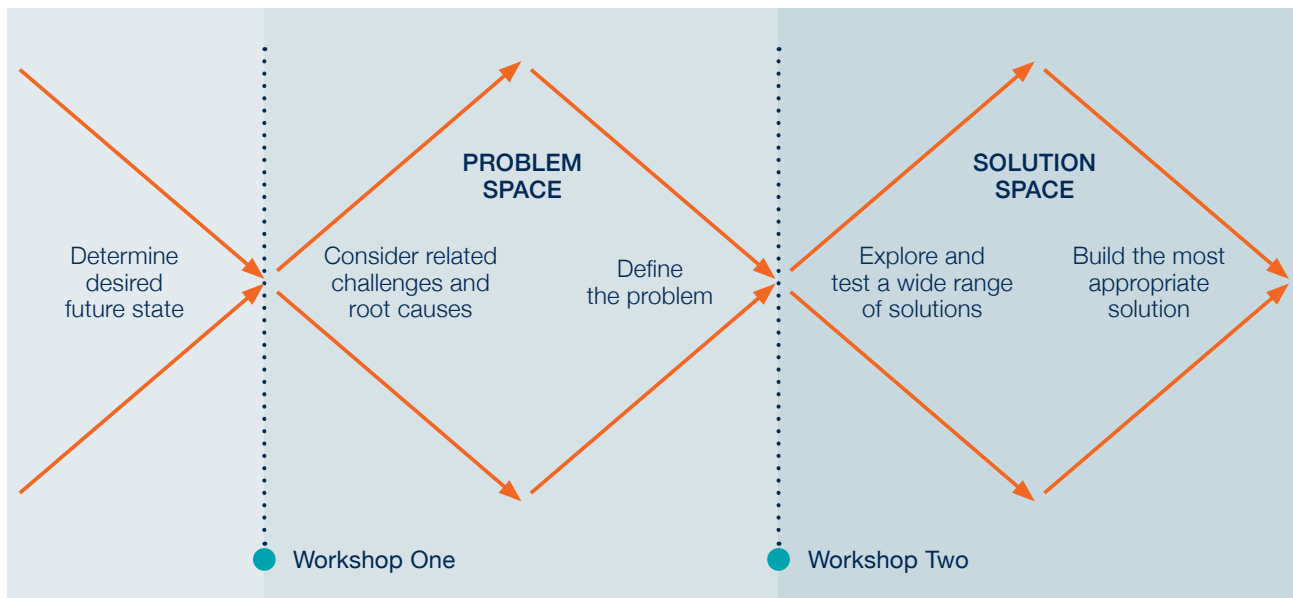
The two workshops were structured based on the Double Diamond approach, a process commonly used to design solutions to complex problems. There are typically four stages:

1. Discovery – understanding the problem and root causes
2. Definition – defining the problem
3. Development – exploring possible solutions
4. Delivery – choosing and building the solution⁷

The first workshop focused on the first two stages (the “problem space”) and the second workshop focused on the final two stages (the “solution space”).

The project team connected weekly with community organisations in the lead up to their first workshops, providing advice and guidance and troubleshooting any aspects of the workshop design.

Figure 6. Workshop structure based on the Double Diamond approach



7 The Victorian Government (2023), Introduction to human-centred design, <https://www.vic.gov.au/introduction-human-centred-design>

Results – four unique solutions

The project team worked with community organisations to build on the strengths and work already undertaken and to design projects that will increase the emergency resilience of their communities. Each project focused on a different issue and resulted in a different solution.

A simple and accessible emergency preparedness plan

NEMA

NEMA has already undertaken a raft of work to provide information and resources in language to the communities it serves. NEMA has run a series of sessions in Bright, Mansfield and Beechworth, connecting emergency services with multicultural communities and providing information on how to respond in an emergency. As part of this, NEMA recommends that households complete a plan, which brings together the key information they might need in the event of an emergency. Feedback from multicultural communities is that the template is too complicated and overwhelming. NEMA undertook to co-design a simpler, more accessible version with their community, focusing on older migrants.

Advocating for your health needs training

POD

POD works with seasonal and undocumented workers in the Shepparton region and beyond. The workers face multiple vulnerabilities to emergencies and natural disasters including crowded and inappropriate housing, language, visa and financial barriers to accessing primary health care, and a lack of culturally appropriate information about preventative health. POD decided to build on its Partners for Change project, to develop a health advocacy training for its community to support access to basic health care. POD presented the training to its community and produced a series of short videos in-language of community leaders providing valuable health information on Australia's health system and costs, private health insurance, and basic health rights. The project focused on Fijian, Samoan and Tongan workers.

Recommendations for working with multicultural communities

SMECC

SMECC wanted to build on the success of its Sunraysia Multicultural Response Group, which is comprised of multicultural leaders and emergency services and was established to respond to the COVID pandemic. SMECC re-convened the group to develop guidance for mainstream organisations to work more effectively with multicultural communities. The Sunraysia Multicultural Response Group is comprised of leaders from a range of communities including Fijian, Malaysian, Solomon Islander, Tongan, Congolese, Ni-Vanuatu, Afghani, Filipino, Indian, and Burundian.

Emergency management system 101

AWECC






AWECC identified that existing emergency management information assumes a base level of knowledge about the system that newly arrived migrants do not have. For example, understanding the difference between the Country Fire Authority and State Emergency Services, or that in Victoria the ambulance service is not free unless you have ambulance cover or a Health Care Card. AWECC set out to work with newly arrived migrants from the Democratic Republic of Congo to develop an 'emergency management 101' video to provide basic information including costs of services to community members.

A journey map is a design tool that is used to visualise of how a person interacts with a product or service. They usually follow a template that includes the process stages, key events or actions, what people may be thinking and feeling, and insights into how the journey or interaction could be improved to lead to better outcomes. We produced this journey map during the co-design training session with AWECC and NEMA to consider the experience of a person who doesn't speak English well seeking help for a medical emergency.

Figure 7. Example journey map for calling an ambulance

Sara, who doesn't speak English well needs to seek help for a family member who is experiencing a medical emergency.

JOURNEY GOAL: Get help for a family member who is unwell.

JOURNEY STEP	FEELING	THOUGHT	ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS
Sara first calls a friend and community leader for help. They advise her to call an ambulance.	 Worry, concern	<p>What number do I call?</p> <p>Does it cost anything?</p> <p>I won't be able to afford it if it is expensive.</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Promote information about emergency services, including costs and contact details through community leaders.</p>
Sara calls 000. The person on the other end gives the option of "Fire, Police or Ambulance".	 Fear	<p>I don't understand what I'm being asked.</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Share information on what to expect when you call 000.</p>
The operator isn't able to understand the situation. Sara goes to get help from a neighbour.	 Panic	<p>I need an interpreter.</p> <p>This is taking too long.</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Make sure people know how to ask for an interpreter.</p>
The neighbour calls 000 again, and is able to explain the situation and get help.	 Some relief	<p>I'm lucky my neighbour is home.</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Facilitate community connection. Neighbours can be helpful in an emergency.</p>
The ambulance arrives and is able to provide the help that's needed.	 Confusion	<p>How do I explain their medical history?</p> <p>What will happen next?</p>	<p>✓</p> <p>Make sure first responders are trained in using interpreting services.</p>

Learning

There were a range of learnings from this project, which can inform future community-led change and capacity building.

Working with local partners embedded in multicultural communities is transformative

We approached four local community organisations that are embedded in their local communities. Each of the organisations have established networks, communication channels, trusted relationships, and social connection. We were very conscious of the risk of outside organisations coming in to ‘fix’ issues after a disaster without knowledge of local dynamics and without due respect for the organisations that have been working with communities for years, and that will continue to work with communities after the project has ended. It was a conscious decision by VCOSS to work through local community organisations, to build on existing work, and support the sustainability of project outcomes.

One of the local community partners acknowledged that their “community’s priorities are changing so rapidly that it’s hard to know what to choose to focus on.” Instead of starting something new, this community organisation – SMECC – chose to build on the success of its Multicultural Response Group and document lessons learned.



Lesson for future projects:

Work directly with community organisations and fund them appropriately to resource projects.

Multicultural community leaders are on all day every day and the value of cross-sector networks cannot be underestimated

Multicultural community leaders gave us a clear message that they are working to support their community all day every day. We heard stories of:

- Multicultural communities donating funds for the body of a community member who passed away to be transported home.
- Leaders taking people to doctors they have relationships with who will not charge them for their service.
- Community organisations, leaders and volunteers paying out-of-pocket for groceries and other essentials to make sure people had what they needed after the floods.
- Leaders advocating for health rights in emergency rooms in hospitals at any time of day.
- Community organisations directly funding medical bills and flights home for seasonal workers who had unplanned pregnancies.

We also heard the varied experiences of multicultural leaders in terms of how mainstream emergency services engaged and built networks with them. Some regions had built strong relationships during the COVID pandemic, which have subsequently waned. Other areas struggled to build and sustain productive relationships between mainstream organisations and multicultural organisations despite ongoing efforts. All of the community organisations invited mainstream services to attend co-design workshops, with varying degrees of success. The existing relationships rely on networks of committed individuals rather than structural, ongoing and funded organisation-to-organisation relationships.



Lesson for future projects:

Services and authorities working with multicultural organisations should support building and strengthening relationships between local multicultural communities and mainstream services.

It takes time and a shared foundation of knowledge to do effective co-design

Approaches to community participation vary in terms of the level of engagement required of participants and the degree of influence they have over decision-making. Many communities and organisations desire and advocate for moving towards co-design and co-production, but these approaches require a high degree of resourcing, expertise and a commitment to power-sharing.⁸ It may also take time to build shared knowledge and language around an issue, before groups are able to start a co-design process.

Each local partner's engagement approach was therefore tailored to the knowledge and expectations of their communities. For example, NEMA support an older migrant community that do not use emergency readiness plans and had not been actively engaged in the process before. Engagement activities were designed so they could participate and provide their feedback on an existing template, while also building their broader knowledge and awareness of emergency preparedness and local support services.

In the case of the community AWECC were supporting, they felt that there needed to be a base level of information about the emergency services

system before engaging the community in co-design activities. They undertook a survey to gauge the level of knowledge amongst the community about emergency services, to identify gaps and target activities and content.

In contrast, the Multicultural Community Response Working Group that SMECC convenes have been meeting for over a year. The relationships between community leaders are well established and they have been advocating for change to support multicultural communities for a longer period of time. This meant the process started with an open conversation reflecting on the work so far and progressed quickly to shared decision-making on how these learnings could be shared.

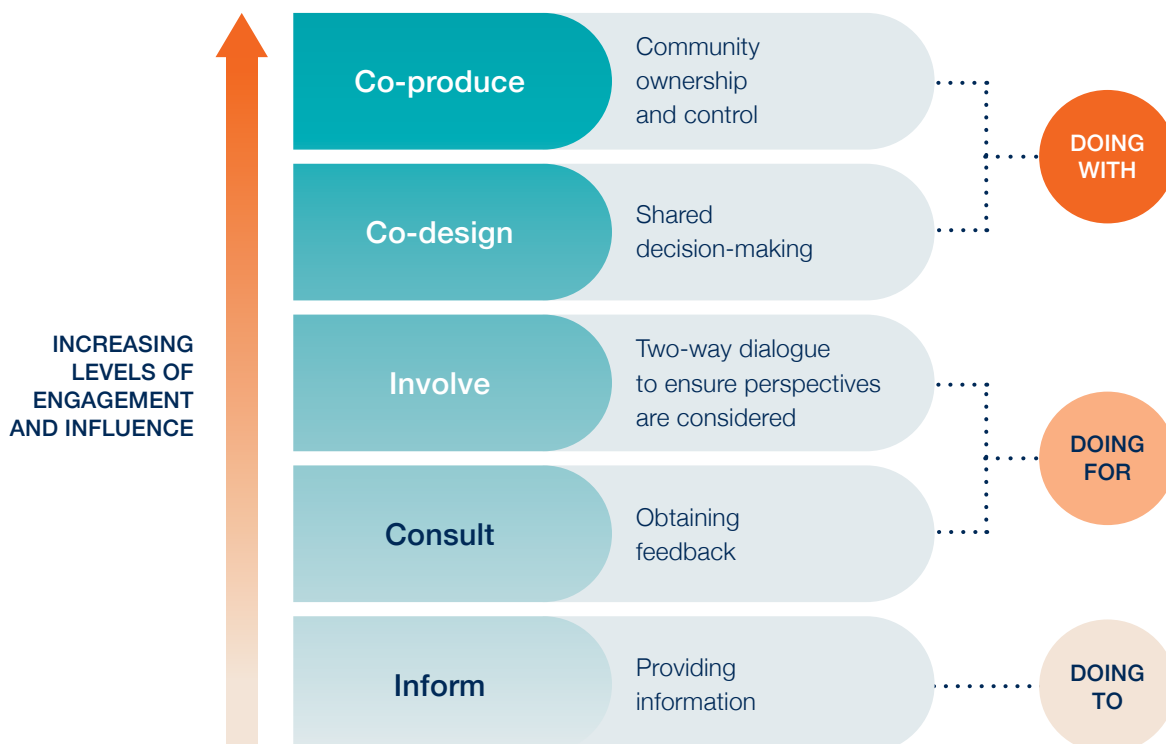


Lesson for future projects:

Design projects to meet multicultural communities where they are at, and ensure time to build knowledge and capacity to enable effective co-design and co-production.

Figure 8. The ladder of participation

Source: Adapted from: New Economics Foundation, *Co-production in mental health: A literature review*, 2013



8 Emma Blomkamp, 'The Promise of Co-Design for Public Policy', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, v. 77, p. 729–743, 2018

Co-design starts with empathy – and understanding experiences from the perspective of community members is a strength of local multicultural organisations

We trained community organisations on a range of co-design tools including an empathy map, which was one of the most popular tools with local partner organisations. An empathy map is an intuitive tool that makes visible what community members may be thinking, feeling, saying, and doing. Community organisations noted that empathy mapping would be incredibly valuable for mainstream organisations to do before engaging with multicultural community members. They also recognised through this learning experience how much they already use empathy in the design and delivery of their services.

For example, recognising their community's experiences of food insecurity, POD provides a range of ways for community members to contact them for food boxes with privacy, dignity, and respect – they can walk in at the community centre, they can call, or direct message via social media. They recognise that if community members experience any barriers to contact, such as long wait times or difficult intake processes, they will disengage. They keep intake processes to a minimum and provide more anonymous (for example, social media and phone) options to connect. Food boxes contain culturally appropriate food with enough food for large families. Mainstream community services provide food boxes typically for a family of four, but the average family size in communities they serve is much larger.



Lesson for future projects:

Consider the role of empathy as a foundational tool in co-design and a key strength of community-based organisations.

Figure 9: POD's version of an empathy map, based on an artwork at their office.



Taking a trauma-informed approach is a key practice tool in co-design with multicultural communities on disaster resilience

We provided basic information on trauma, trauma responses and practices to provide choice and agency, and took a trauma-informed approach in facilitating workshops. We recognised that the subject matter of the workshops such as barriers to accessing healthcare and emergency response may be challenging for some members of the community, particularly in the wake of the floods. In addition, our training provided a high-level overview of different types of power, supporting multicultural organisations with a structural analysis of power as applied to emergency management.



Lesson for future projects:

Take a trauma-informed approach to engaging with multicultural organisations and their communities, and consider power dynamics.



Culturally responsive co-design can strengthen engagement

All of the community organisations we worked with adapted the training on co-design, including tools and resources, to be appropriate for their communities. For example, POD deeply considered the principles of co-design and recognised that the idea that communities know what they need is not unique to the Western methodology of co-design. POD used a Samoan proverb, “e fofo e lealamea lealamea” or “the solutions lie within our communities” to communicate the purpose of their health advocacy workshop. They also replaced the ‘debrief and discussion’ parts of the workshop with ‘Talanoa’ sessions.

The embedding of cultural knowledge and practice into the health advocacy workshops by POD brought a level of cultural safety and cultural pride to the workshop, which was deeply valued by participants and by the project team.



Lesson for future projects:

Support, encourage and enable multicultural organisations to use their cultural knowledge and practices to achieve the project’s objectives.

TALANOA

“Talanoa is a generic term referring to conversation, chat, sharing of ideas and talking with someone. It is a term that is shared by Tongans, Samoans, and Fijians. Talanoa can be formal, as between a chief and his or her people, and it can be informal, as between friends in a kava circle. Talanoa is also used for different purposes; to teach a skill, to share ideas, to preach, to resolve problems, to build and maintain relationships, and to gather information.” The Kakala Research Framework, Seu’ula Johansson Fua.

Future directions

Recommendations for policymakers and emergency management practitioners

Throughout this project, conversations with agencies, services and organisations and leaders shed light on systemic issues that require attention.

The co-design work undertaken with local partners also highlights how community-led and place-based approaches can be utilised by government and emergency services to strengthen the disaster resilience of multicultural communities.

This is of critical importance as climate change brings with it disasters of increasing magnitude and frequency.

To meet these challenges and support community resilience, VCOSS recommends that the Victorian Government, local authorities, and emergency services:



Build trusted relationships

1

Invest in engagement activities that foster social connection and build relationships between communities, services and authorities.

2

Establish and fund ongoing forums for collaboration between multicultural community organisations and emergency services at a state and local level.



Co-design communications

3

Train multicultural community organisations in emergency management messaging and provide funding to enable them to lead the dissemination of information to their communities.

4

Fund community projects and partner with community organisations to co-design resources for and with multicultural communities.



Enable community-led, place-based support

5

Involve multicultural communities in the planning and design of relief and support services.

6

Fund multicultural community organisations to provide culturally appropriate and accessible services for their communities.



Ensure sustainability

7

Provide ongoing funding to multicultural community organisations so they can build and maintain their capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from escalating disasters.



Build trusted relationships

Recommendations

- 1 Invest in engagement activities that foster social connection and build relationships between communities, services and authorities.
- 2 Establish and fund ongoing forums for collaboration between multicultural community organisations and emergency services at a state and local level.

Relationships, trust, and reciprocity are key foundations of disaster resilience. As demonstrated through the Sunraysia Multicultural Response Group, and the information sessions hosted by NEMA and AWECC, multicultural organisations are already playing a role establishing stronger connections between communities and authorities. There is therefore an opportunity for the government to build on these approaches and embed collaboration, reciprocity, and trust into the system.

As a starting point, communities must be involved in decisions that impact them. This can be achieved via partnership models like the Sunraysia Multicultural Response Group, where multicultural community leaders and emergency service organisations come together regularly to exchange information and solve collective problems. Forums such as this could be replicated in each area and equivalent models established at the state level.

Building reciprocity and trust between multicultural communities and authorities is also important. This involves the two-way exchange of values, knowledge, and skills.⁹ It is not enough for emergency services to impart knowledge onto communities, authorities must also consider the ways in which multicultural communities' understandings of resilience, skills, and coping strategies can be incorporated into the mainstream.¹⁰ This involves services and authorities getting to know their communities, investing in community engagement activities, and maintaining open, two-way channels of communication.

9 Mark Duckworth, 'Just Add Trust: Implementing Diversity and Inclusion in Emergency Management,' *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, January 2022, p. 18–20

10 Michele Grossman, 'Prognosis Critical: Resilience and Multiculturalism in Contemporary Australia,' *M/C Journal*, v. 16, no. 5, August 2013



Co-design communications

Recommendations

- 3 Train multicultural community organisations in emergency management messages and provide funding to enable them to lead the dissemination of information to their communities.
- 4 Fund community projects and partner with community organisations to co-design resources for and with multicultural communities.

During the pandemic and the floods, multicultural community organisations and leaders demonstrated their capacity to translate and share important messages with their communities. This is a strength that must be fostered. Government can support this critical work by providing training to multicultural community organisations and leaders in emergency management messages, and providing funding to support the translation and dissemination of resources to communities.

Multicultural communities are diverse, speak hundreds of different languages and have varied communication preferences. While maximising the reach of mainstream messages is important, the government should also invest in co-designing communications for and with multicultural communities.

Effective communication requires a deep understanding of how messages will be understood and acted upon within the cultural and social context they are received. Multicultural community organisations and leaders hold this knowledge. Young people also often act as translators and connectors in their communities. Involving them in not just the dissemination but also the design of messaging and the format of the content can ensure that messages reach as many people as possible and have the desired impact on behaviour.



Enable community-led, place-based support

Recommendations

- 5 Involve multicultural communities in the planning and design of relief and support services.
- 6 Fund multicultural community organisations to provide culturally appropriate and accessible services for their communities.

Considering cultural needs and values, as well as how multicultural communities may face discrimination or additional barriers in accessing services and support, is critical in enabling resilience. Multicultural community organisations and leaders play an important role advocating for culturally safe support and equitable access to services for their communities. They also provide much-needed direct relief, particularly where mainstream services fail to cater for their communities.

The gaps and barriers experienced by multicultural communities, however, could be avoided if communities and their leaders are involved in the planning and design of relief and support services.

Furthermore, multicultural community organisations, if sufficiently funded, are often best placed to directly provide relief to their communities as they understand cultural needs, speak community languages, and have strong trusting relationships with those who they support.



Ensure sustainability

Recommendations



Provide ongoing funding to multicultural community organisations so they can build and maintain their capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from escalating disasters.

As Victoria faces increasingly frequent disasters with compounding impacts, the government must invest in the capacities that enable communities to bounce back time and time again. For multicultural community organisations, their relationships with community members, government and emergency services are a critical resource in enabling disaster preparedness, response, and recovery.

Relationships, however, take time and resources to cultivate and maintain. Multicultural community organisations therefore need ongoing funding to ensure their relationships are enduring and able to be leveraged during emergencies. Ongoing funding will be critical in enabling organisations to sustain themselves so that they can broker partnerships between communities and authorities, develop and disseminate key messages, and provide culturally safe relief.

We need to look for ways of engaging community before emergencies, so that systems we have in place are well adapted to address the needs of the community. Richard Ogetii, CEO, AWECC



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