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BUILDING INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide basic guidance for emergency services practitioners to support the building of respectful and inclusive partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. This document focuses on general guidance that applies when working with all CALD communities. However, as each community has its own context and character, it is important to be mindful of the need to adapt practice to work with each community's specific needs.

This document draws from the general literature, and the following reports from the BNHCRC project 'Diversity and inclusion building strength and capability':

- ~ Young, C., Cormick, C., and Jones, R N. (2020). *Learning as we go: support for diversity and inclusion practitioners and decision makers*. BNHCRC, Melbourne.
- ~ Young, C., and Jones, R N. (2019). *Risky business: why diversity and inclusion matter*. BNHCRC, Melbourne.
- ~ Young, C., Jones, R N., and Kumnick, M. (2018). *The long road: building effective diversity and inclusion in emergency management organisations. Case study synthesis and draft framework*. BNHCRC, Melbourne.

CALD COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA

Australia's population is increasingly characterised by its cultural diversity and inclusive partnerships, and CALD communities and their leaders are of growing importance for effective emergency management. CALD communities in Australia can be defined by their ancestry, cultural background, and languages spoken at home. 49% of Australians were either born overseas or have one or both parents born overseas, while 21% of Australians speak a language other than English at home. There are over 300 non-English languages spoken in homes across Australia, the most common being Mandarin, Arabic, Cantonese, and Vietnamese (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2017).

But how is cultural diversity understood by different people, and why is it an important consideration in engaging with CALD communities? A culture can be understood as the ways in which a group of people see the world, developed from shared experiences. A cultural group's origin may not necessarily be geographic, and one country may contain many cultural groups. For example, the South Sudanese community in Melbourne is made up of several different cultural groups, including the Dinka and Nuer.

It is also important to recognise the complexity of faith-based diversity within CALD communities. For example, the Lebanese community in Sydney adhere to several different religions, including (but not limited to) Maronite Catholicism, the Greek Orthodox Church, Sunni Islam, and Shia Islam. This diversity needs to be considered in any partnership with a CALD community.

As well as diverse cultural values held by individuals, CALD communities may be notable for their social structures, institutions, and forms of organisation. These communities may also contain multiple capabilities that are potentially important resources.

CALD communities are becoming increasingly prominent in regional and rural Australia. Factors that have led new migrants to choose to move to parts of regional Australia (ABS, 2017) include jobs in primary industries and food processing, as well as nursing and small business. One prominent example is Robinvale, a Riverina town in north-western Victoria, in which 59% of the population of 3,300 residents have at least one parent born overseas. In Robinvale, 13.5% of residents identify as having Italian heritage, 5.9% Tongan, and 4.4% Vietnamese. See Case Study 2 (p13) for an example of how the Robinvale Area Health Service has engaged and successfully involved their CALD communities in health promotion.

CALD COMMUNITIES AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Partnerships with CALD communities are important for emergency management organisations (EMOs) for the following reasons:

- ↻ **Improved community access and safety:** The long-term development of CALD partnerships can assist in understanding how to better serve the needs of these communities.
- ↻ **Innovation:** Bringing together parts of the community to address common goals in preparation for, and in response to, emergencies through inclusive decision-making processes, can result in the development of enhanced and innovative solutions.
- ↻ **Trust:** Long-term partnerships with CALD communities are necessary for building trust. This is vital for success, because trust enables participation (as residents, volunteers, or workers) and is key to effective communication (see Cormick, 2018).
- ↻ **Increased ability to achieve desired outcomes:** Engagement with CALD communities may provide opportunities for more effective emergency management solutions (for the benefits of diversity and inclusion [D&I]), see Young, et al., 2018). This can be achieved through understanding values related to safety, participation, and authority, and the diverse ways in which communities solve problems.
- ↻ **Knowledge and capabilities:** CALD community organisations may have experience and local knowledge about how to organise and engage their own community. This can include an understanding of values, community structures and the pathways for communication. For example, during Melbourne's COVID-19 lockdown, the local chapter of the United Sikhs organisation utilised their already existing networks to provide food services for those at risk, partnering with diverse groups such as Let's Feed, Rehmat Sandhu Foundation, UMEED and the Uniting Church Wyndham.
- ↻ **Reduced conflict:** An awareness of, and partnership with, local CALD community organisations can help to navigate divisions between Anglo-Australian and CALD communities, and the sometimes deeply entrenched differences within CALD communities themselves.
- ↻ **Social benefits:** By creating partnerships with CALD communities, there is empowerment of the community and stronger relational capacity, as well as ripple effects stemming from investing in these relationships that can be of later (and often unanticipated) benefit to emergency service organisations in the future. (See Case Study 2.)

Strength-based (rather than deficit-based) community development can reduce cultural barriers and build capability by drawing on what already exists within CALD communities. For example, there may be pre-existing support networks for non-English speakers in the community. These are often seen as trusted sources of information in communities through which communications can be relayed without the need for additional translation services.

The following case studies and list of considerations for engaging with CALD communities build on earlier approaches, such as those outlined in the *Guidelines for Emergency Management in CALD Communities* (Australian Institute Disaster Resilience [AIDR], 2007), and are also aligned with the inclusive principles outlined in the *Diversity and inclusion framework for emergency management policy and practice* (Young, C., and Jones, R N., 2020) and previous research by this project. They focus on utilising the knowledge and capabilities of these communities. They also explore the role of organisations and networks as inclusive partners, in the co-generation of solutions that are inclusive, and go beyond communication or consultation to engagement and participation.

CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE WORKING WITH CALD COMMUNITIES

This is a list of prescriptions and strategic questions for assessing opportunities to increase D&I through partnering with CALD community stakeholders. Areas for consideration include:

- ↻ The context, capabilities, and inclusion needs of the CALD community or communities you are focusing on.
- ↻ The engagement mechanisms (such as committees) you are seeking to establish. Identify if there are any opportunities to leverage existing community, welfare and religious organisations or sporting club activities? For example, if there is a need to talk to a CALD community about fire safety plans, would this be best undertaken through a stand-alone event, or in conjunction with existing community events, such as social gatherings or language classes?
- ↻ Consideration of the potential benefits that may result from this partnership for this community and your organisation. How will it benefit those partnering with you? What will they gain from the time and resources invested by your organisation and the community?
- ↻ Where opportunities might exist to include local CALD knowledge as part of your organisation's activities. For example, during an emergency is there information which would it be useful in Incident Control Centre activities?

Understanding diversity in your community

The starting point for engagement is understanding the CALD communities, the people within these communities, and what opportunities exist to initiate meaningful engagement with them. This process is one of learning about the community and building trust. Community members need to see that you are genuinely interested in their community and your intention to include them. To achieve this you need to be prepared to:

- ↻ listen and learn openly and wholeheartedly
- ↻ acknowledge cultural, linguistic, and spiritual differences and be prepared to work through situations that may be challenging
- ↻ allow the community to lead and to support them to develop resilience rather than reliance
- ↻ listen to their needs and find a complementary agenda that you can act upon as a basis for discussion of your needs.

As a starting point it is useful to develop a demographic profile to give you an overview of the different types of diversity in your community. Local Government websites or the ABS Community Profiles are useful for this as they provide statistics relating to the number of languages other than English spoken at home, religion, and ancestry. Identify potential points of initial contact such as peak bodies and community leaders who are known.

The following questions can also be useful:

- ↻ How effective is current communication between the community and your organisation?
- ↻ Are there cultural sensitivities or tensions between different communities and what is needed to manage that effectively?
- ↻ Are there specific cultural considerations in relation to gender, sexuality, disability, and age?
- ↻ Does this community have specific needs and how should these be accommodated?
- ↻ What are the vulnerabilities or challenges they face?
- ↻ How do current decision making, and communication processes operate in the broader community they live within? Are the processes accessible, understandable and available to the community you are approaching? What arrangements and networks already exist and how might you work with them?

Useful resources for finding initial contacts

- ↻ **Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia**
www.fecca.org.au
- ↻ **Community Languages Australia**
www.communitylanguagesaustralia.org.au
- ↻ **Ethnic Community Services Co-operative (Sydney)**
<https://ecsc.org.au/about/>
- ↻ **Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria**
<https://eccv.org.au>

Understanding CALD skills and capabilities in your community

CALD community members often possess specific capabilities and skills that can be built or leveraged to support community safety and enhance response and recovery activities. It is important to identify what these skills are and whether there are potential barriers to individuals being able to use these capabilities, such as poor language skills, lack of time or cultural barriers to participation.

Some examples of capabilities and skills might be:

- ↻ **Skills:** The CALD community you are partnering might have skills that could be vital to generating solutions to the major issues they are facing. These may be cultural competency, communication, technical or organisational skills. The Robinvale District Health Service project outlined on page 13 provides an excellent example of this, where sharing existing skills across different cultural groups led to increased capacity for wellbeing.
- ↻ **Existing networks:** A CALD community may have strong religious, communication and social welfare networks. Rather than duplicating these, you may be able to utilise them in their existing form through a partnership. For example, providing food aid in association with an existing provider, or partnering with key members in community newsletters or community radio programs to promote your program.
- ↻ **Local knowledge of their community:** Most CALD communities will have a deep understanding of their members, including who the most vulnerable people may be, such as the elderly, unemployed, and those who do not speak English. The community will have experience in assisting and communicating these people, and that valuable knowledge could be incorporated into response planning.

Resilience: Certain communities may have knowledge or experience of disaster response (for example, post-war refugees, or migrants who have survived natural disasters). Having lived through these experiences, they may have developed capabilities and skills that can be transferable to their local community natural hazard context. On this other hand, this may also be an additional risk factor, leading to those who have experienced disasters falling back on previous responses through force of habit, in cases where they might not be appropriate.

It is useful to map the resources that already exist when partnering with a community, as this can support better planning of activities and provide a focus for discussion (Figure 1).

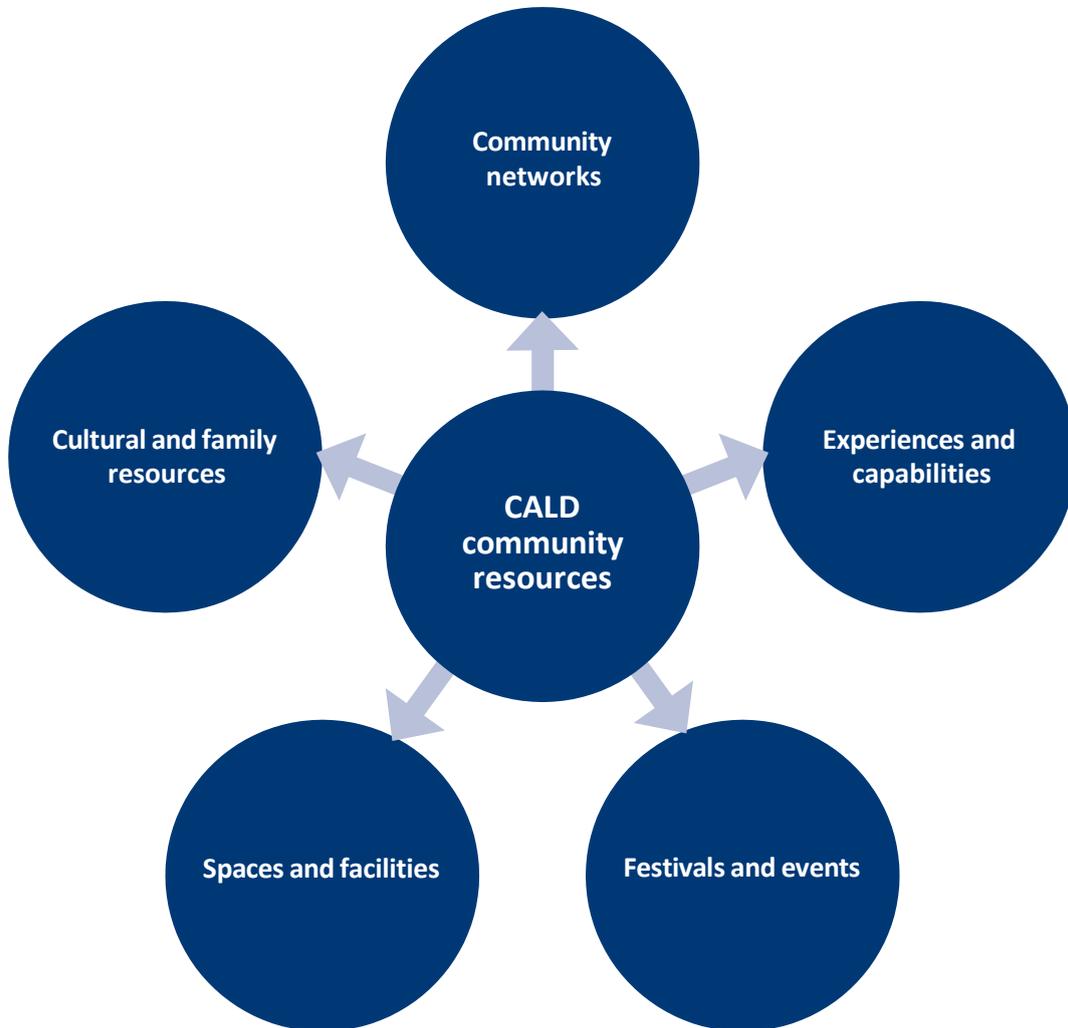


Figure 1: Example of useful areas to consider in a CALD community capability map.

Cultural and family resources are resources such as financial, material, and emotional support and can be provided by family, cultural, faith-based or community networks. It can also include cultural and local knowledge that can be helpful for understanding who is at risk, what situations people are in, and how they are coping.

Community networks are how people with common values and beliefs interact and are important as they provide trusted pathways for participation and communication. Community networks can be leveraged as portals for communicating information, for example, through specific community language newsletters, online groups, radio programs, and extended cultural or family networks. The Life Saving Victoria Multicultural Projects (see case study on page 20) has successfully achieved this by drawing key members of the community into participation in first participating in, and then recruiting to and teaching, its water safety programs).

Festivals and events include faith-based gatherings, community and cultural festivals, arts festivals, and markets. These are important events where community perceptions and relationships are reinforced and offer opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the community and to increase engagement.

Spaces and facilities include churches, mosques, temples, community centres, or halls that support networks and connection in communities.

Experiences and capabilities: Each community has specific experiences and capabilities. Mapping specific experiences can help to identify capabilities that can be developed and implemented within the emergency services. For example, an individual may have been a teacher and have useful skills in relation to community education programs relating to emergency services.

CALD community attitudes and understandings

Individuals from within CALD communities may possibly have different understandings of fire and natural hazards when compared to the wider community. Engage with the CALD community leaders and organisations you are working with to consider some of the following issues:

- ↪ **Risk perception:** How do the CALD communities you deal with perceive risk in terms of the emergency management context you are dealing with? Do they have experience with natural disasters, social disasters and food shortages? If so, is there an increased likelihood of trauma as a result, or is there greater resilience and specialised knowledge?
- ↪ **What is the education level in terms of the public understanding of science?** Is there a need for specialist community education about fire and natural hazards? Are there opportunities to involve champions from within the community who may have specialist knowledge or skills (for example, scientists or teachers, or those who have knowledge of emergency management from overseas contexts)?
- ↪ **Who is likely to be the most appropriate person to deliver the information so that it is heard and understood?** For example, does this community trust and respect technical experts and researchers? This will help shape how your information needs to be communicated and who needs to communicate it. This will also help determine what the best communication avenue is. For example, are elected community or faith-based leaders best placed to deliver the material or should it be trusted scientific authorities or politicians?
- ↪ **Are there different attitudes related to community services that may influence how community members understand and perceive volunteering or social responsibility?** It is important to be aware that CALD communities may understand and engage in volunteer participation in different ways. There may be a belief that the community as a whole volunteers through existing collective organisations or faith-based networks, rather than volunteering independently.

CONSIDERATIONS WHILE WORKING WITH CALD COMMUNITIES

Barriers to inclusion

In developing partnerships with CALD communities, it is important to identify potential barriers to inclusion prior to engagement. These can include structural factors (social, cultural, or economic) that make it difficult for the community to engage. Because of the important role families may play for individuals in providing a sense of belonging and material support, it is important to be aware if there are additional pressures to conform to familial authority or parental expectations. Some useful questions include:

- ↪ Are there stereotypes in the community about your organisation which may act as a barrier for those who might participate in your initiatives?
- ↪ What is the degree of cultural awareness of the people from your organisation who will be undertaking project activities? Is there a need for cultural awareness training? Do you need to provide a safe place to examine unconscious biases, to help determine who is most suited to working with CALD communities? Is your view of this community based on context specific knowledge or preconceived ideas or assumptions that may need to be challenged?
- ↪ Are there parental expectations, especially around career choice, which may constitute a barrier to diverse and inclusive participation?

Practical considerations include:

- ↪ If you are hosting meetings in multiple languages, do you need specific translators for each community? Are levels of fluency or literacy varied and is there a need for tailored visuals and audio to support communication? Are there CALD community members who might be vision impaired, who might need audio communication support? Do you need to include welcomes in different languages?
- ↪ Is the food served at your meeting venues and events inclusive? For example, are there vegetarian options for Hindus and Buddhists, and halal options for Muslims?
- ↪ Is your meeting venue inclusive? For example, if it is the local pub, is the service of alcohol likely to exclude anyone?
- ↪ Are your meeting times inclusive of work schedules? Some CALD community members may work long hours or multiple jobs, which may need to be considered.

- ↻ What is culturally important to this community? For example, does your schedule of events factor in significant spiritual and holy days in the multi-faith calendar which are acknowledged by the Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia or interfaith networks.
- ↻ Does the group you are working with have different concepts of time and punctuality? For example, in some cultures, when a starting time is advertised it is considered polite that one should arrive after that time, as arriving at the specified time is considered to be rushing the hosts, creating unnecessary stress.
- ↻ Are there particular customs around greeting, naming, personal distance, and body language? For example, in some cultures, eye contact is considered rude. Be mindful that greetings vary widely across cultures and shaking of hands and bodily contact (touching) on first meeting can be disrespectful in some cultures, especially between genders. Instead, the appropriate greeting may be a gentle bow, or putting one's right hand over the heart. The SBS Cultural Atlas (<https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/>) is a useful resource outlining the cultural norms of over 60 migrant groups in Australia, in a nuanced and sensitive manner.
- ↻ Note that many cultures, naming conventions may differ. For example, some migrants from East Asian backgrounds may state family first, then personal name, while for some migrants from South Sudan, formal address may be based on title plus first name, as family names often indicate the first name of the grandparent.
- ↻ What are the gender-related values and beliefs within the community? Be sensitive to stereotypes and seek the guidance from the community members you are collaborating with in relation to this.
- ↻ It is important to be aware that not everyone in a CALD community may agree with official community leaders, and there may be different values, belief systems and agendas within a community that may need to be negotiated.

Understanding stigma

Stigma is a negative perception applied to particular groups or individuals. It is important to consider the potential impacts of stigma on the CALD communities you are working with and how this may impact how they may perceive and receive information from your organisation. If you have to engage with a stigmatised group, it is critical to recognise that they may feel under attack and be highly sensitive. It is important to be informed as to what actions and language may inadvertently reinforce this stigma.

Some considerations to reduce the impact of stigma on CALD communities include:

- ↻ Frame issues in terms of opportunities rather than deficits. Where possible draw on the existing skills and capabilities of the community and include them as part of the solution process. You can also explore if there is an opportunity to reduce stigma through your partnership. For example, an ANROWS report (2020), found that CALD communities are more likely to participate in initiatives aimed at preventing family violence if the processes are framed positively and highlight community initiatives.
- ↻ Understand how the community views institutions and authorities. In some cases, CALD communities may be wary about engagement with authorities. The reasons for their reluctance to engage might include historical experiences of stigmatisation, fears of discrimination, or distrust in institutional authorities in their country of origin. This has resulted in some community members responding fearfully to people in uniforms or seeing them as a threat.
- ↻ When working with CALD communities, awareness of how the people you are working with are feeling is important. Successful engagement in this respect will depend on how well a person from your organisation can read the room, body language, ability to think on the spot, and the attitude they project. Ascertain if the community are likely to welcome the acknowledgement of differences and diversity or if the emphasis on difference may be unwelcome. Which category a situation falls into will depend on the context, power relations, and whether the focus on difference will have positive effects (such as empowerment, or tailored services), or marginalising effects (contribution to stigma or negative stereotypes).
- ↻ Being constantly made to feel different can be draining to members of stigmatised groups. It is important to also remain politically neutral on differences within the community, highlighting principles of understanding and respect for all members and voices. It is important to understand that accepted cultural values and belief systems are continually negotiated and change. The degree to which a community will hold beliefs and habits similar to their country of origin is shaped by many factors which can include age, the length of time someone has spent in the country, and their current social context. Inappropriate stereotyping can result in reinforcement of stigmatisation.

Identity and intersectionality

Individuals in all communities have different roles and characteristics which form their identity. These can interact and create different patterns of marginalisation, and this is referred to as 'intersectionality'. This may create additional challenges and/or opportunities for engagement. The following are examples of where this may be an important consideration:

- ↻ Women from CALD communities may face double marginalisation, both as women, and as members of their community. The manner in which these roles interact can be complex. It is important to keep an open mind and be aware of stereotypes of gender roles within the CALD community you are working with.
- ↻ Young people may serve as a bridge to their parents and the older generations in communicating risk related information. For example, in many first-generation migrant families, children may be the primary point of assistance for translation and/or assisting their parents in navigating processes and institutions, such as how to fill in a form or lodging a complaint.
- ↻ Young people may also play key roles in educators, assisting their elders to understand the need for, and adherence to, emergency management plans and regulations. Their understanding of the role of such strategies and institutions may be more positive than their parents.
- ↻ Inter-generational differences may affect who needs to be communicated with, and how this communication needs to be undertaken. In some cases, the values of young people and older people within CALD communities can be contradictory and may need to be negotiated. For example, migrants who have experienced scarcity may regard stockpiling of used building materials as a potential resource, while their children may view this activity as creating a fire hazard. Listening to members of these communities telling their stories is vital to making sense of the very logical reasons communities maintain these practices and norms.
- ↻ CALD community members with special needs may also experience compounded disadvantage in terms of accessing services or lacking support from the community.
- ↻ It is important to be aware of communities who have experienced civil, political, or faith-based conflict as this can both positively and negatively influence how they interact within other members of the community. In some cases, different members of the community may acknowledge different leaders.

Translators and interpreters

Translating material accurately for CALD communities requires specific expertise and knowledge of that community, and inaccurate translation can undermine the credibility of your organisation or project and create confusion.

Considerations for effective communication with members of CALD communities include:

- ↻ Some concepts that are understood by English-speakers might not translate effectively. For example, 'social distancing', 'yellow flags', 'water safety', and 'bushfire survival plan'. People whose first language is English, often understand these concepts because of repeated public education campaigns, which may not have reached those whose first language is not English. There may need to be specific in-language material developed to address this with the community. Alternatively, material can be targeted to CALD communities, with emphasis on visual and video materials to account for varying levels of literacy and fluency.
- ↻ What you wish to convey and how this needs to be framed will depend on the social context of the partnership and its relationship to existing knowledge.
- ↻ Getting the right tone is important and this determines not only who might be the best person but also how they will need to frame the information. Do you wish to communicate in a more formal or authoritative manner, or in a friendlier and informal manner? It is important to discuss these issues with the translator and community stakeholders, as some languages have 'high' and 'low' forms, and others have 'formal' and 'informal' forms of address. Using an inappropriate tone or form of address may create the perception of being rude or offensive.
- ↻ Consider how what you say may be interpreted, as the same word may mean something quite different in another culture. Issues and solutions need to be framed in a culturally appropriate way and focused on the community you are speaking what they have to offer.
- ↻ Spoken languages and written languages are not always the same. This difference may contribute to determining whether to communicate in written or verbal form. When translating written materials or in conversation it is important to ensure that you have a translator who has specific knowledge of the community you are working with and can identify the most appropriate communication for your target group. For example, when working with Chinese communities from particular geographic areas, the spoken languages and written languages that would be most widely understood by the target audience are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Chinese communities from particular geographic areas, and the spoken and written languages that would be most widely understood.

Country	Spoken language	Written language
China (mainland)	Mandarin	Simplified Chinese
Hong Kong SAR	Cantonese	Traditional Chinese
Taiwan	Mandarin	Traditional Chinese
Singaporean Chinese	Mandarin	Simplified Chinese

Note that those of Singaporean Chinese and Hong Kong origin will be likely to speak English as well.

CASE STUDIES OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH CALD COMMUNITIES

Case Study 1: Life Saving Victoria's multicultural projects department

Life Saving Victoria's (LSV) Multicultural Projects Department was created in 2007, in recognition of opportunities to increase D&I within LSV, and address water safety concerns for CALD groups including international students and international visitors. Coupled with this was a recognition of the lack of influential role models for CALD communities in life saving, and barriers to participation in swimming lessons and water safety that resulted in CALD Victorians being five times more likely to drown than non-CALD Victorians (LSV, 2020).

The LSV Multicultural Department program offerings are of two types. Intervention Area 1 includes mass education programs revolving around water safety. These include educational classroom visits to schools, beach education, open water learning sessions, and swimming courses. Intervention Area 2 includes more in-depth programs for a smaller number of participants, which aim to encourage public participation and empowerment, and include a Volunteer Surf Lifesaver program, first aid training, and participation as pool lifeguards and swimming teachers.

By 2020, over 22,000 CALD Victorians were accessing these programs annually, with 60 young people involved in the Intervention Area 2 programs being placed in water-related and emergency services jobs annually (LSV, 2020). One example of where this program has been successful in building diversity is at Bonbeach Life Saving Club in Victoria (LSV, 2017), which to date has succeeded in recruiting more than fifty lifesavers from Afghan, Pakistani and Cambodian backgrounds.

The key factors identified in achieving the success of this program were:

- (1) The establishment of a specialist multicultural department within LSV in 2007, solely dedicated to multicultural engagement. This meant a commitment to context-specific and long-term engagement that facilitated the development of specialised staff, specialist delivery methods, and specialised resources to support this area of work. The existence of a specialist department meant a stable repository for lessons learned each year as the program developed.
- (2) A popular product, which was of obvious benefit to CALD communities (and not simply LSV). In this program, LSV were able to offer water safety, education, training, and employment to CALD communities, in a format that was easy to participate in and enjoyable. Since the benefits were clear to CALD communities, there were significant incentives for participation at all levels.
- (3) Strong engagement with gatekeepers (key community members who linked the LSV to their CALD communities), who were able to tap into existing networks (schools with high CALD student numbers, sporting clubs, and language schools), and act as champions for the program. In the first year, the program had 10 partners, which has grown to about 400 by 2020. A focus on the education of gatekeepers so they become champions in the community promoting the program, resulted in self-sustaining recruitment and growth.
- (4) A structured framework for developing increased participation from CALD community members (Figure 2). At the bottom of the pyramid are Intervention 1 Area activities involving large numbers of participants in classroom, beach courses and swimming lessons. Participants may then choose to participate in Intervention Area 2 activities, firstly the 'Targeted Training Programs', then increasingly Community Volunteering and Emergency Services. These programs enable empowerment and cohesion amongst CALD community participants and provide important role models and positive media engagement for more people. This also creates an organic base for building ongoing participation in LSV from within CALD communities. The model allows increased participation, but also creates its own recruitment and staffing resources by involving CALD communities at all levels – from first contact to development of leadership.

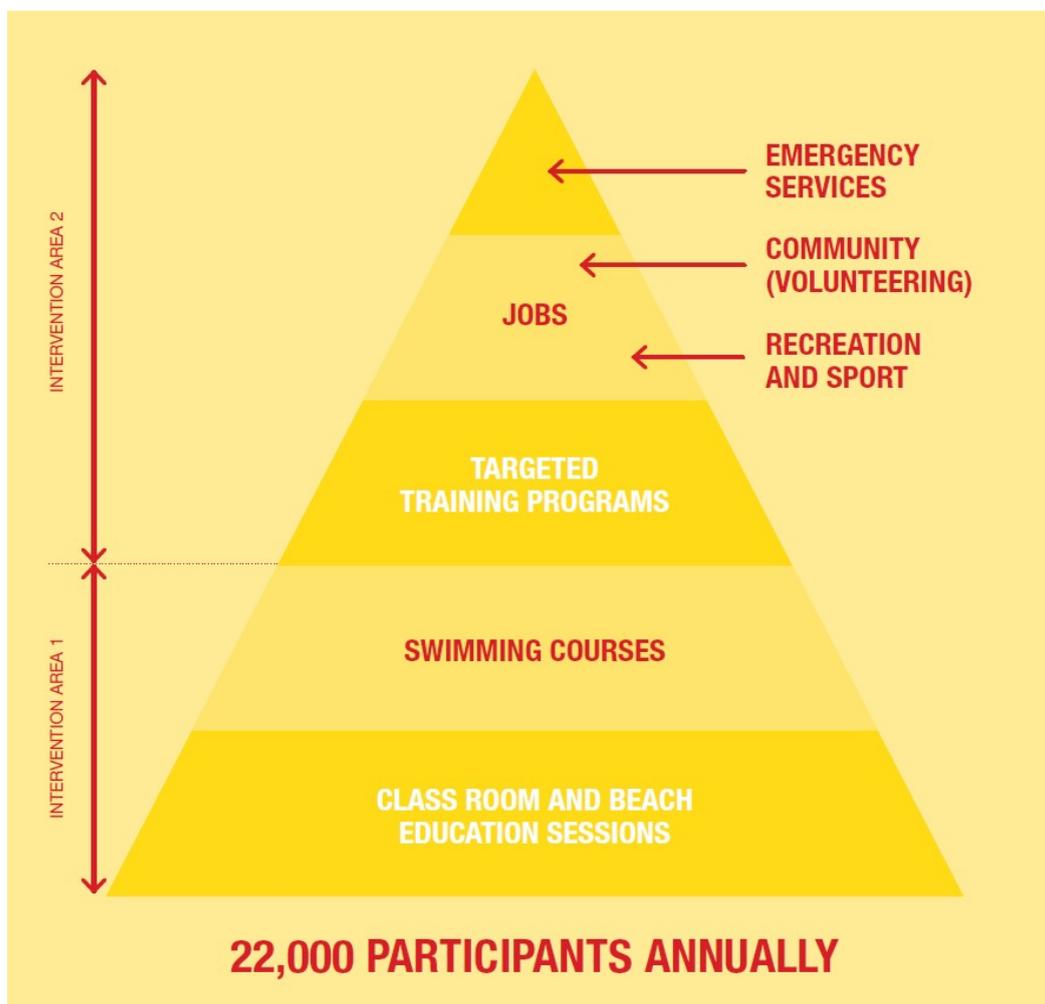


Figure 2: Participation pyramid for LSV multicultural department programs, reproduced from LSV (2020).

Case Study 2: Robinvale District Health Services – The Ripple Effect of Ethnicities (TREE) project

Robinvale is a small regional town located in north-western Victoria on the Murray River, with a population of 3,000. It has a very diverse CALD community (42% of residents born overseas), with over 40 ethnicities represented, including residents of Vietnamese, Tongan, Malaysian, Italian background (ABS, 2016).

The Robinvale District Health Services (RDHS) recognised that the level of ethnic diversity presented various opportunities and challenges for community health promotion. As a response to the level of the diversity in the community, they initiated The Ripple Effect of Ethnicities (TREE) project, a pilot program to advocate for mental health and wellbeing by creating engaging and culturally safe spaces for the diverse CALD communities to participate. The ‘ripple effect’ in the title captures the strategic orientation of the plan: the strengthening of relations and trust with, and between, CALD communities would result in a greater capacity for public health collaboration in the future. The initial two phases of the project were a skills exchange and a multicultural festival.

The first phase of the TREE project recognised that empowering the voices of partnering CALD communities was vital to realise increased public health, and a series of consultations took place to ensure that the project took a form that was ‘relevant, relatable, and transferable’ to the CALD communities (RDHS, 2020). This included two focus groups with community leaders. The skills exchange program lasted for 18 weeks, with nine participants from various cultural backgrounds. In this exchange, each participant had to teach the others a skill from their culture (such as Tapa painting, Fijian basket weaving, and cooking from various cuisine). These cultural exchanges not only empowered each community but created links between the town’s numerous CALD communities.

The second phase of the TREE project was the Multicultural Festival, first held in November 2016 at the Robinvale Community Centre. The festival provided a platform for all communities to participate in hosting food stalls, market stalls and cultural performances. This festival was repeated in 2017 and 2018, building upon the relationship between RDHS and the town’s CALD communities.

This is an example of a project in which building social relationships has a ripple effect in building ongoing capacity. The relationships, networks, and trust built are key foundations for the ongoing long-term partnerships for health promotion and public wellbeing. Rather than a deficit model, in which the lack of knowledge would be used as the starting point for engagement (for example, through educational workshops), this strategy mobilised CALD community capabilities as the starting point for stronger D&I that built on capabilities and relationships for health and wellbeing.

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