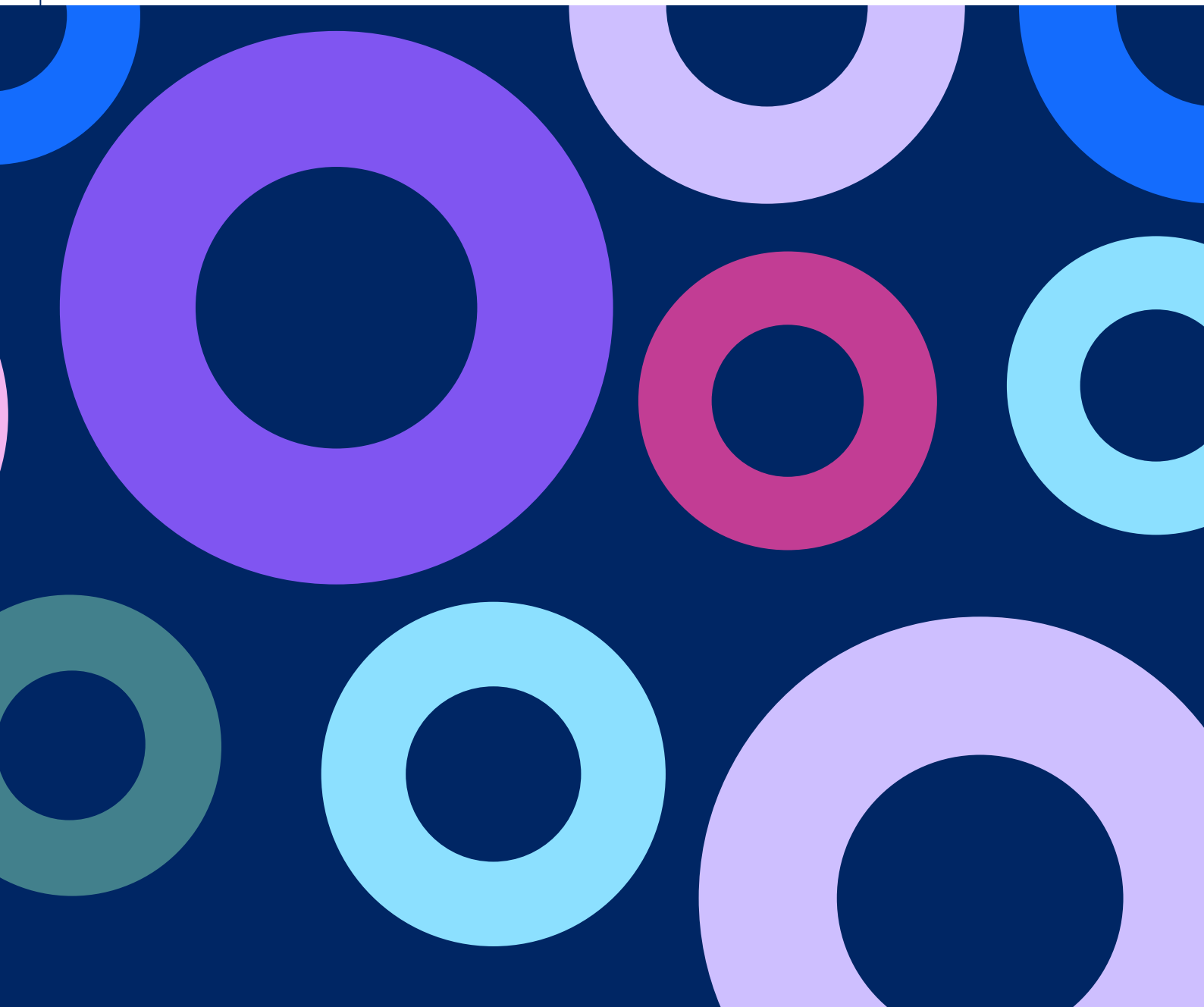# Empowering Communities through Strategic Communication Project Report

NSW GOVERNMENT

Executive summary

In mid-2021, the NSW community was severely impacted by the spread of the Delta strain of COVID-19. Uncertainty surrounding the virus, the rapidly changing environment, and the restrictions placed on communities to try and stop the spread were causing confusion, isolation and uncertainty. In some geographical locations, some communities perceived the response to the pandemic as inequitable and divisive.

In response to the Delta outbreak, the NSW Government initiated the Delta Micro Strategy which was built on eight Pillars: Vaccines, Testing, Public Health Orders, Payments, Community, Businesses, Public Service, and Aboriginal Regional and Rural Responses.

The communication response to the COVID-19 outbreak

This report details how a communication response under Pillar 5 – Community, was carefully crafted by government agencies working in the fields of multiculturalism, Aboriginal Affairs, health, ageing, disability, justice, regional affairs and local government.

With the insight and expertise of these government agencies, the Department of Communities and Justice developed the Empowering Communities through Strategic Communication Project, which ran from August to December 2021.

The project pinpointed gaps occurring in communication at the important grassroots level so those gaps could be addressed within concerned communities. In the early stages of the project, it became clear that many of these information gaps were being filled by rumour, misinformation and anxiety-driven conjecture.

This occurred against a backdrop of information overload, with communities exhausted and overwhelmed by frequent and shifting COVID-19 media reports and government updates.

The approach focused on the ecosystem for crisis and recovery. Specifically, it looked at how strategic communication could enhance social cohesion, encourage compliance with COVID-19 rules and maintain confidence in the future and social cohesion. The ultimate goal was to maintain public trust.

This report explains how key communication gaps were identified and how communication was shaped to fill those gaps in a way that resonated with intended audiences. It shows how being responsive to the needs of community groups and building communication capability can empower community organisations and leaders to respond effectively to the needs of their community, in a crisis, with information and guidance that allays stress and confusion.

Key outcomes from the project include:

- Increased confidence and capacity to communicate in a crisis amongst community groups and leaders through the provision of practical support
- A reduction in the stress and confusion experienced by communities as a result of more effective communication from trusted organisations and community leaders that met their information needs and helped combat misinformation
- Improvements in community groups' connectivity, reach and positive influence within their communities
- For harder hit communities, validation of traumatic experiences and support to start making meaning from these experiences through opportunities to be heard and documentation of their experiences.

Empowering Communities through Strategic Communication Project

The Project was delivered in two phases. The first phase of the project involved collecting insights from impacted communities through social media analysis and stakeholder interviews. These sources provided an accurate snapshot of public commentary, including across perceived inequities in lockdowns, anti-vaccination sentiment and finger-pointing around non-compliant behaviours.

The insights provided the foundation for the second phase which included three streams of activities that aimed to build social cohesion and trust, to encourage communities to comply with COVID-19 regulations and provide reassurance that the challenge of the pandemic could be managed and overcome.

The three streams included:

1. Togetherness communication to support the NSW Government and communities

2. Tailored strategic communication support to provide immediate and experienced strategic communication and crisis communication capacity

3. Lifting capability so community groups could develop their own communication.

Stakeholder and social media pulse checks were taken weekly throughout the Project to allow the activities to respond to the changing environment.

1. Togetherness communication to support the NSW Government and communities

NSW Government communication included intelligence and insights into what communities were discussing and concerned about. Examples of social media community/togetherness stories were curated and shared through government social media channels and included stories about community food drives, positive media coverage about the COVID-19 strategy and vaccination calls to action.

Community-focused togetherness communication highlighted positive efforts within diverse community groups to stay connected. This included supporting the communication and promotion of Western Sydney Arts Alliance activities, as well as community initiatives such as home learning support, mental health initiatives and school holiday activities during the lockdown period.

This stream also included work with the Islamic Council of NSW (ICNSW), bringing together local leaders and community members to discuss, share and record experiences, learnings and recommendations for future health crises.

2. Tailored strategic communication support to provide immediate and experienced strategic communication and crisis communication capacity

Tailored strategic communication support recognised that, particularly in Local Government Areas (LGAs) of concern, the needs of no two councils, community groups and leaders were the same. Social listening and direct engagement with community groups produced a stream of responsive, bespoke strategic communication and crisis communication as needed.

Examples included supporting Cumberland Council to streamline information and strengthen its stakeholder engagement approach in support of broad COVID-19 communications and assisting Inner West Council to develop a social media video. Work was also undertaken with the Anatolian Community Services group to engage with mothers left isolated when face-to-face meetings ceased due to pandemic regulations.

This report also illustrates how the communication response was designed to inform and empower stakeholders, community groups and respected community leaders so they could talk confidently with community members. The aim was to arm these strategic communicators with accurate, up-to-date information to clear up the spread of misconceptions and untruths.

3. Lifting capability so community groups could develop their own communication

This report also details how collective trauma and strategic communication capacity was strengthened to help community groups develop their own narratives and messages. This initiative recognised the importance of diverse community groups in throwing their support behind campaigns that could shift behaviour in a positive way.

This was achieved by working with community groups in facilitated workshops. The workshops covered: understanding the environment and audience, mapping stakeholders who can help amplify the message, and developing messages and narrative.

Workshops provided details of COVID-19 and emergency management arrangements in NSW. The initial workshop also provided information about how to tackle misinformation and was a precursor to two further workshops. These workshops focused on understanding and responding to community-wide effects of COVID-19 and how best to use strategic communication during the pandemic. In total, 35 of these online workshops were delivered to almost 500 participants from local governments, faith and cultural groups, peak bodies, advocacy groups and state government agencies. Those participants represented 95 different organisations, including 35 local councils from across NSW.

Results, learnings and recommendations

This report details key successes and learnings. These include the effectiveness of the social listening and stakeholder research that was pivotal in driving communication and the engagement strategy and in getting ahead of issues and misinformation.

An accessible 'how can we help' approach was effective, appreciated and allowed immediate communication challenges to be identified and rectified. It was welcomed by community organisations and leaders who had little or no communication expertise and who were uncertain of how to communicate with their audiences at this time of crisis.

A feedback mechanism provided a gateway for groups to be heard and helped with how to achieve their outcome. This approach fostered trust and the confidence that grew the capabilities of community groups to positively influence and impact their communities.

The workshops were overwhelmingly popular. More than 90 per cent of participants said the workshops increased their understanding of the community and psychosocial impacts of collective trauma events like the pandemic, and of strategic communications. In addition, 84 per cent of workshop participants said they increased their knowledge about emergency management processes, and 85 per cent took away practical ideas to support their communities.

This report identifies five key learnings from the life of this program:

1. Daily restriction changes caused confusion and loss of trust

2. This was compounded for culturally and linguistically diverse communities

3. Many young people (aged 12+) disengaged with COVID-19 communications as they felt they didn't reflect their experiences, making it more challenging to reach them

4. Misinformation and disinformation were flourishing and impacting communities

5. The 'tsunami' of top-down information during lockdowns caused stress and confusion.

Recommendations

1	Formalising a crisis insights generation framework to be quickly activated in another crisis
2	Creating local community crisis hubs
3	Continuing to build strategic communication capacity and capability with community groups and leaders
4	Adding additional mechanisms to increase access to translations
5	Empower existing student leaders across the state to inform government messages and help deliver critical information
6	Increasing awareness and understanding of misinformation and how to safely address it.

Background

In mid-2021, the NSW Government established a multi-faceted response to the Delta outbreak of COVID-19. Known as the Delta Micro Strategy, this response included eight Pillars.

01 Vaccines	**02** Testing	**03** Public Health Orders	**04** Payments
05 Community	**06** Businesses	**07** Public Service	**08** Aboriginal Regional and Rural Response

Pillar 5 of the Delta Micro Strategy focused on empowering community groups to deliver local services and support during the pandemic.

This included:

- efforts to mitigate COVID-related risks in Aboriginal communities
- a suite of community grant programs to enable local organisations (grassroots organisations, NGOs and local councils) to deliver targeted support services in their community
- emergency management, relief and recovery work
- community sentiment analysis and insights reporting
- multicultural media and communications work.

The Steering Committee for Pillar 5 included representation from a variety of government agencies: Multicultural NSW (whose CEO was the chair), Aboriginal Affairs NSW, NSW Health, Resilience NSW, NSW Department of Communities and Justice, NSW Department of Customer Service, NSW Police, the Centre for Aboriginal Health, Regional NSW, Ageing and Disability Commission, and the NSW Office of Local Government.

To support the Pillar 5 work, the Department of Communities and Justice created the Empowering Communities through Strategic Communication Project. Specifically targeting an identified gap in grassroots communication, the project ran from August to December 2021. This report provides an overview of the project, lessons learned and recommendations.

The challenge

During the Delta outbreak, the rapidly changing environment, increased restrictions and perceived inequities in the government and police response, as it related to particular locations, created anger and division in the community. People and communities felt confusion, isolation and uncertainty.

This experience manifested itself initially in LGAs of concern. Over the course of the outbreak, this sentiment spread across NSW, sparking protests and greater regional and metro divides.

There were growing conspiracies about vaccination, government intentions and overreach. Combined with genuine concerns about the length of the lockdown and the impact on people's mental health and business, there were fears about the effect on community, cohesion and democracy.

Top-down crisis communication efforts had reached saturation point. The frequent, sometimes daily, changes in restrictions made it challenging for communities to understand what the restrictions meant for them, their families, jobs and businesses. Community groups and leaders, many of whom had become trusted messengers throughout the pandemic, needed support to navigate the complexity and commuicate clearly.

In this environment, it was important to empower stakeholders and community groups to deliver local support and services. Strategic communication played a key role in this regard.

At a grassroots level, there was an urgent need to promote cohesion, boost capacity and lift capability. This approach needed to complement top-down communication, particularly from the NSW Government, and be tailored to the specific needs of groups and leaders. The support needed to be delivered quickly and efficiently to make a difference during this time.
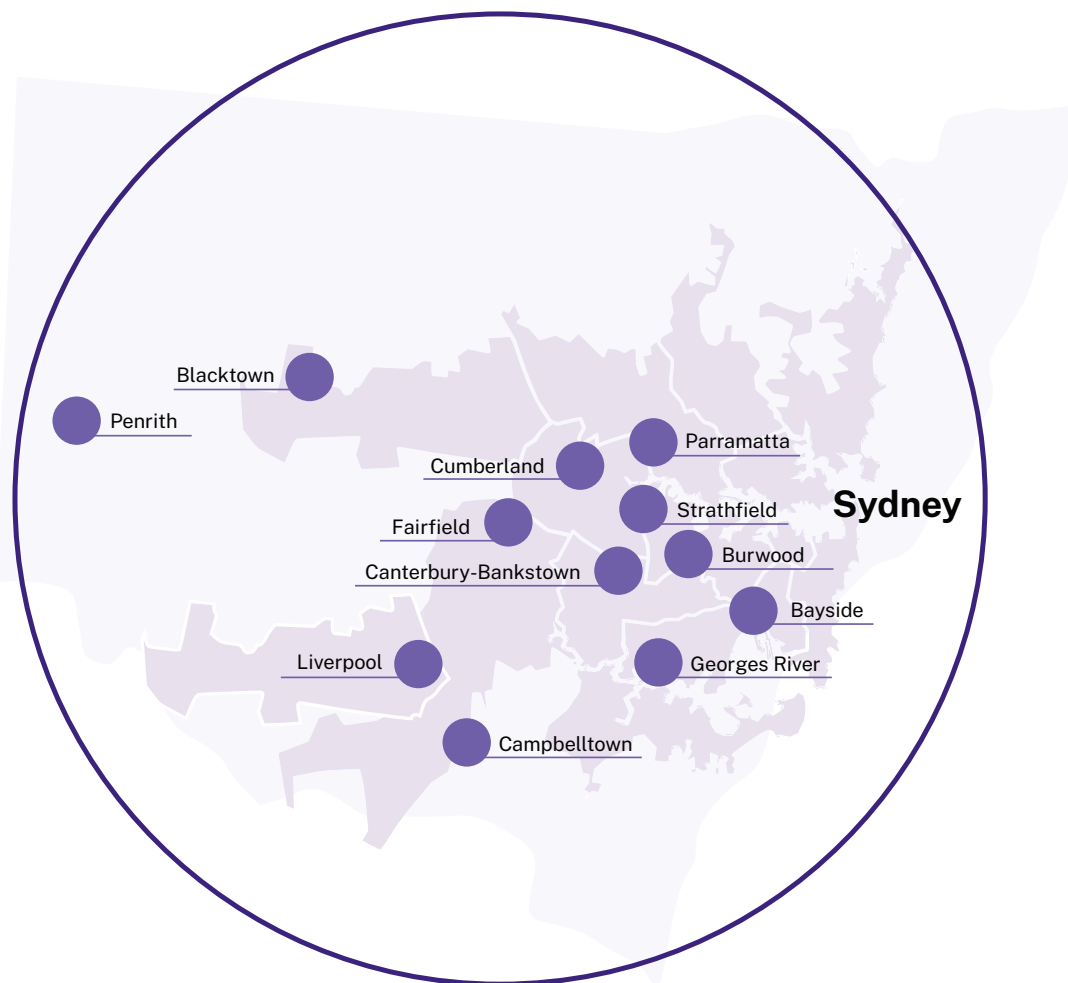
LGAs of concern

The Empowering Communities through Strategic Communication project

The Empowering Communities through Strategic Communication Project was led by the Office of Community Safety and Cohesion within the Department of Communities and Justice, which engaged strategic communication consultancy, SenateSHJ, to support design and delivery of this work. The project aimed to help address the challenges to cohesion and strategic communication capacity and capability.

The approach focused on the ecosystem for crisis and recovery. Specifically, it looked at how strategic communication could enhance social cohesion, encourage compliance with COVID-19 rules and maintain confidence in the future. The ultimate goal was to maintain public trust.

The program of work included three streams of activities underpinned by insights generation:

1. Togetherness Communication

To balance the growing division, promote cohesion and compliance, and help protect against conspiracies and misinformation

2. Tailored Communication Support

Fill the gap that top-down communication couldn't, by providing instant communication capacity and solutions to support community-specific grassroots challenges

3. Capability Building

Provide a large scale lift in capacity to support communities in dealing with COVID-19 as a collective trauma event, communicate in crisis and during recovery and build awareness of misinformation

Insights Generation

Insights generation

Insights generation was at the core of the Empowering Communities through Strategic Communication Project.

Throughout the project, Multicultural NSW gathered community insights via weekly social media and stakeholder surveys. This was designed to create an evidence base upon which to deliver an agile and responsive strategy.

In conjunction, SenateSHJ produced weekly social media insights reports which captured overall public commentary and sentiment, including conspiracy theories and misinformation circulating in the community.

The reports were disseminated to, among others, the Premier's Office and senior executives across whole of NSW Government.

These reports proved to be valuable 'moment in time' snapshots used to shape and drive whole-of-government communication activities, identify communities in need and amplify stories of community support and connection.

Common themes that emerged across the analysis period included perceived inequities in the NSW Government's approach to lockdowns, anti-vaccination and anti-mandatory vaccination sentiment and rumours and finger pointing related to non-compliant behaviours.

Overall community sentiment was analysed using responses to these themes and other popular topics, including levels of engagement (number of likes, comments and shares), reactions and interactions. This also allowed identification of emerging and ongoing trends.

Much of the negative, divisive commentary across online platforms allowed for the early identification of conspiracy theories and misinformation. Popular conspiracy theories included that the pandemic was a form of government control or that lockdowns were being used as a tool to disrupt holidays and family gatherings. Misinformation was most common in regard to the effectiveness and safety of vaccinations and the level of support for vaccine mandates.
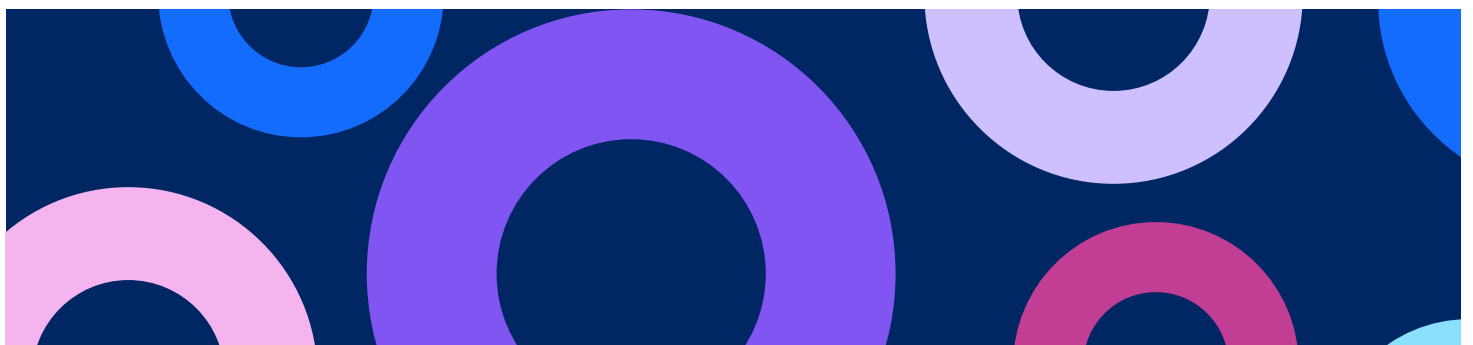
Activity stream 1: Togetherness communication

A range of activities were developed to support the Government's efforts to foster social cohesion and community connections. This included:

- Weekly community intelligence and insights reporting to provide insights into communities, their concerns and conversations, with recommendations about communication activity

- Weekly messages to support cross-government communication responding to the current community mood and need

- Daily curation of social media community togetherness stories designed to be amplified by Stronger Communities cluster, ministers and NSW Government social media channels (Fig. 1)

- Social media posts were identified, curated and supplied daily for sharing by government ministers. The content was tailored to each minister's electorate and emphasised stories of togetherness and community. For example, calls to action to get vaccinated, examples of community food drives and positive media coverage about the COVID-19 strategy (Fig. 2).
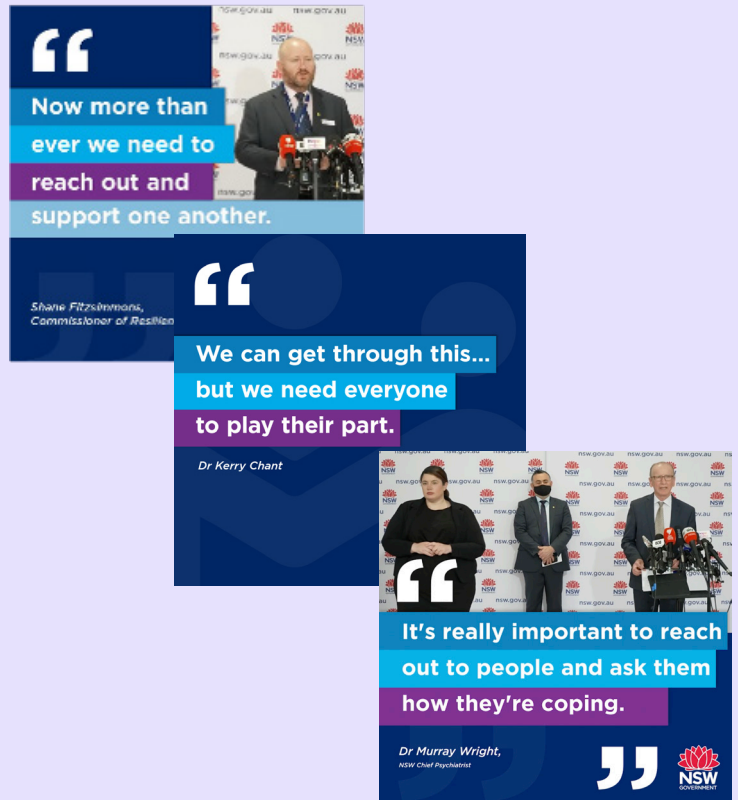
Fig. 2: Social media tiles promoting social cohesion
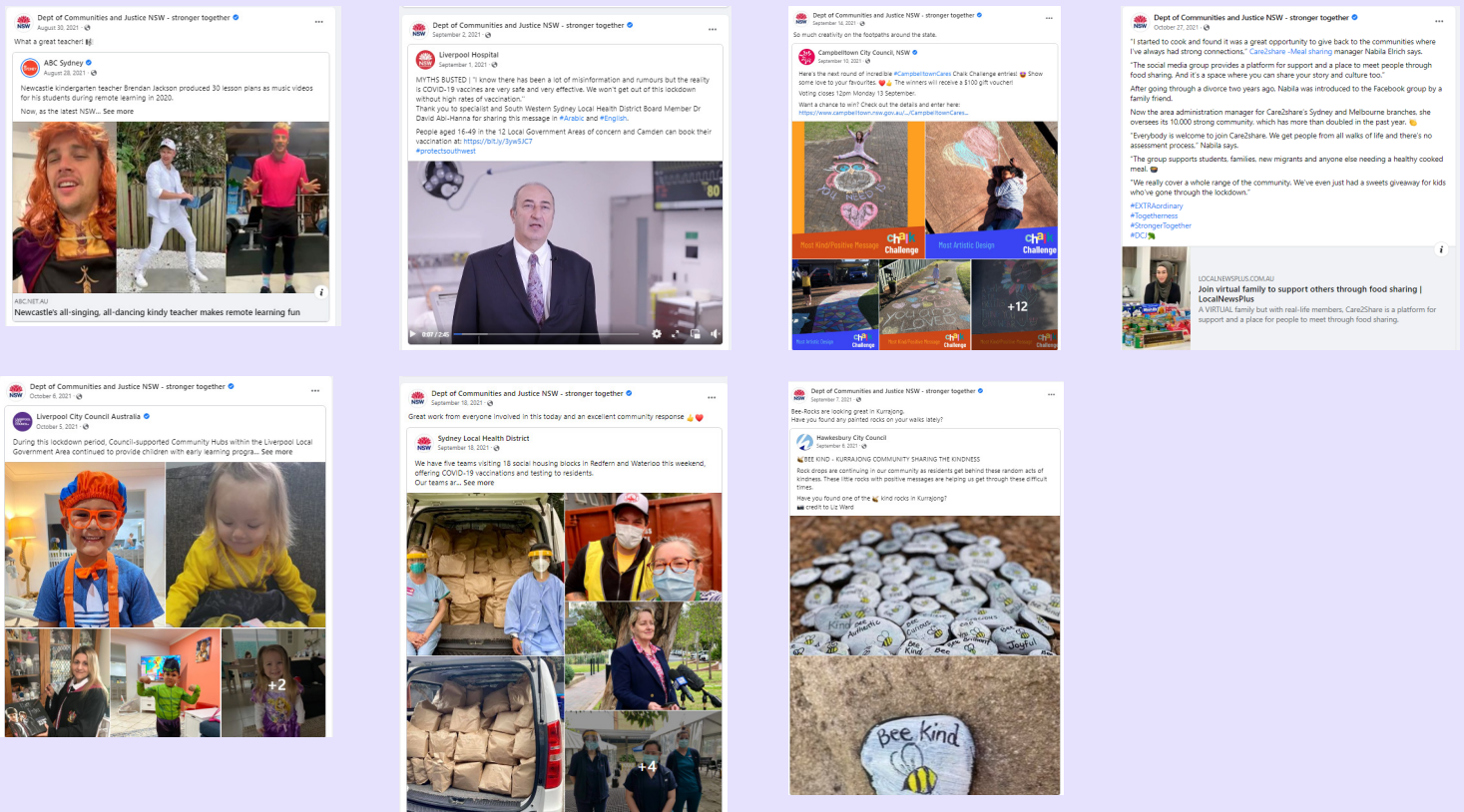
Fig 1: Curated social media content

Togetherness communication support was also provided to communities. Strategic communication counsel, strategy and materials were provided to Western Sydney Art Alliance members to encourage people around Sydney to connect with arts experiences and community members (Fig. 3).

The arts and culture sector makes a significant contribution to the NSW economy and the community's wellbeing. However, due to lockdowns and restrictions, artists were unable to physically connect with audiences.

Turning instead to the digital space, we first amplified the online arts activities calendar created for the school communities of west and south-west Sydney, and then created a similar calendar for adults. These were both amplified using social media posts, newsletter copy, a stakeholder kit and media release.

The Project also included work with the ICNSW that brought together local leaders and community members in areas most impacted by the lockdown period, through an online survey and direct engagement, attitudes and experiences were captured. Topics included lockdown restrictions and enforcements, government messaging and financial and mental health support. The results were the focus of discussion at a leaders forum to determine where communication gaps existed within the community, and to deliver strategies to overcome gaps, counter misinformation and bring communities back together.
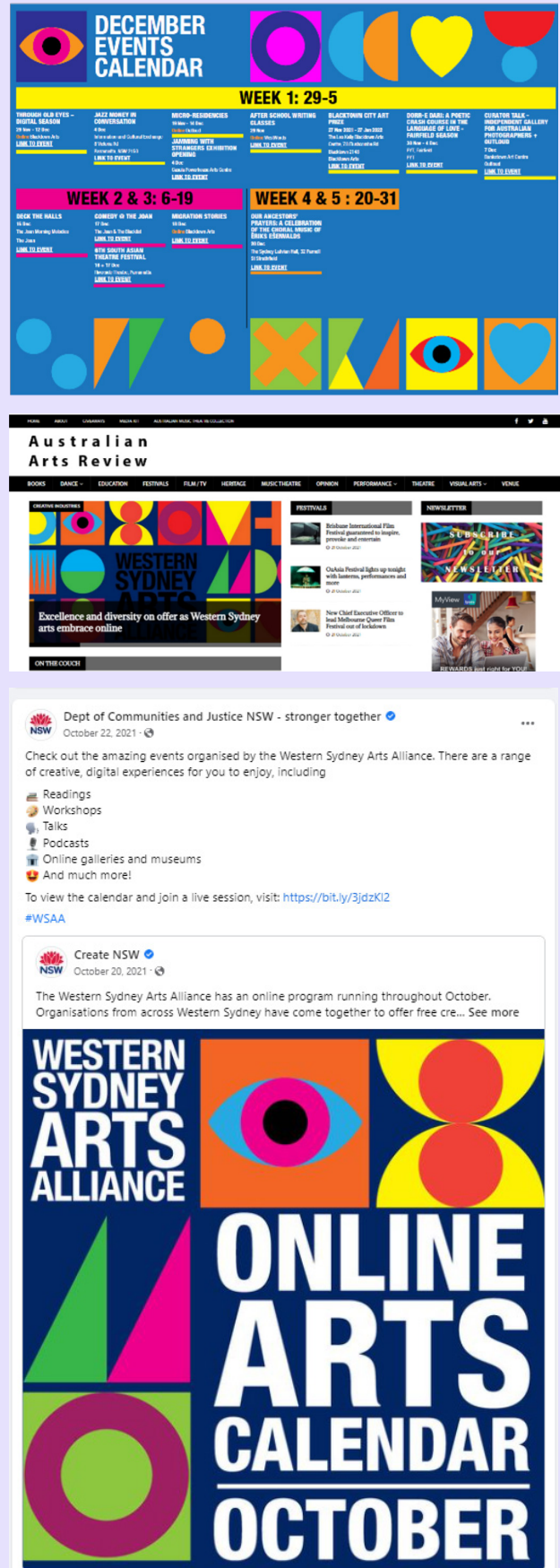
Fig. 3: December events calendar created for WSAA; media coverage of the program

Activity stream 2: Tailored strategic communication support

The intensity of the crisis and volume of changing communication meant some councils, community groups and leaders, particularly in the LGAs of concern, were overwhelmed. In addition, some areas were facing unprecedented challenges in their communities with a need for more tailored strategic communication support.

However, no two needs were the same.

By using insights from social listening and direct engagement with community groups and their leaders, we were able to target our response. This stream of activity provided immediate and experienced strategic communication and crisis communication capacity where individual groups needed it most.

Collaboration with councils, government agencies, faith and community groups to provide tailored communications support to help bring communities together, driving COVID-safe behaviours, or delivering information on financial and wellbeing support.

The program helped to streamline processes to lift some of the load off overwhelmed groups and individuals in a range of community organisations and local government agencies. The approach also helped these groups decipher the daily waves of communication being received.

Importantly, each bespoke solution was co-created with 1:1 engagement, immediately filling gaps and helping lift the load. Each group was consulted, and an assessment of their needs undertaken. This allowed us to adapt or create bespoke messaging and material and provide strategic communications advice.

Activities included:

Immediate crisis and strategic communication support and capacity building

- Delivering a template to Cumberland City Council to streamline information and strengthen its stakeholder engagement approach in support of broad COVID-19 communications
- Assisting Inner West Council to develop a social media video
- Delivering a communication strategy for Canterbury-Bankstown Council to amplify its 'Stay safe, stay connected' message to more people in the community
- Working with the Anatolian Community Services group to help them better engage with mothers in their community who were left isolated when face-to-face meetings were not possible.

Driving COVID-19 safe behaviours and encouraging vaccination uptake

- Providing strategic communication advice to Paramatta Council
- Developing a toolkit for Study NSW to assist education providers, agents and community organisations to communicate tailored information about the vaccine (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Social media content created to facilitate vaccine uptake amongst international students

Delivering information on financial and wellbeing support

• Providing strategy and materials for Multicultural NSW to support promotion of the NSW Government's COVID-19 innovation grants.

Combating misinformation

Misinformation was a challenge for many community groups and leaders. Tailored strategies and content were created for communities at risk, using language and imagery which they could connect with, to drive acceptance and understanding of the government strategy and counter misinformation. This included supporting Basmala Australia to develop a guide for the Muslim community to access accurate information about COVID-19, including identifying which sources were most relevant for the community and developing materials to help drive individuals to them (Fig 5). These materials were provided to leaders to assist them in educating their community.

Tailored content was also developed for Shia National Network of Australia and the ICNSW to help overcome communication gaps and counter misinformation (Fig. 6).

Fig. 5: Communication materials developed for Basmala Australia to highlight resources for accurate COVID-19 information

Fig. 6: Social media content created for Shia National Network of Australia to combat vaccine misinformation

Activity stream 3: Collective trauma and strategic communication capacity building

During the Delta outbreak, the rapidly changing environment, increased restrictions, and perceived inequities in the response to the spread of COVID-19 in particular locations created anger and division in communities and threatened the togetherness of NSW.

People felt confused, isolated, and uncertain about how the pandemic would unfold and affect them and their loved ones. They wanted guidance on what they could do to try and minimise the pandemic's impacts, and in many situations, this information was most effectively delivered by trusted leaders who were deeply embedded in their communities.

Recognising the value of well-equipped, well-informed, and well-connected community leaders to help people during times of fear and uncertainty, the NSW Government organised workshops for community leaders which employed a hands-on approach with plenty of opportunity for participants to practice newly acquired skills and knowledge.

The Safeguarding Social Cohesion During COVID-19 workshops (Fig. 7) consisted of three sessions that covered psychosocial impacts and strategic communication. They were developed and delivered during and after the outbreak. This included: a three-hour introductory session which introduced new knowledge and built the confidence of participants; two three-hour, in-depth learning modules that built on the content of the first workshop.

The first module focused on building understanding of, and responding to, the community-wide psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second module focused on building strategic communication knowledge and the skills of participants.

A total of 35 online workshops – a combination of introductory sessions and in-depth learning modules – were held between September and December 2021. Almost 500 participants from local governments, faith and cultural groups, peak bodies, advocacy groups and state government agencies attended the workshops. The participants represented 95 different organisations, including 35 local councils from across NSW.

Fig. 7: Safeguarding Social Cohesion Workshop invitation

Key outcomes

The following outlines some of the key results achieved during the program and feedback received from participants.

The social listening and stakeholder research proved invaluable in driving communication, engagement strategy and getting ahead of issues and misinformation.

The immediate offer of communication support together with the 'how can we help' approach meant immediate communication challenges could be identified and rectified. This support provided important guidance at a time when many were struggling to know how to communicate during the crisis, particularly for organisations and leaders with no communication expertise. Feedback included:

Wow! This is great. Super easy to use. Thanks, I will give it a go and see what the feedback is like. Thanks again. This is a great tool.

Thanks so much for pulling the guides together - what a great collection of programs.

Thank you Katie, amazing work by you guys, well done. // 501 -visits to website with toolkit // over 4,400 stakeholders received kit via direct email // and over 600 clicked on the link to the kit over 650 impressions on social media.

It's been very well received by our stakeholders and team. We've also been rolling out the assets across socials and they have been well received.

The program helped provide a feedback mechanism where groups could be heard, and their concerns acted on. Feedback included:

In relation to capability building sessions: You provided plenty of opportunities for feedback

Great workshop, thank you. You did really well to engage participants online, throughout the activities, breakout rooms and opportunities to give feedback.

Helping community groups with 'how' to achieve their outcome (not 'what' the outcome should be) fostered trust with government, and enhanced capability and capacity with these groups. It also helped to increase the groups' connectivity, reach and positive influence within their communities. Feedback included:

Thanks a million for working on the best way to communicate with the families attending the AACS playgroup.

This engagement has been enriching for us and we're not going to let it go to waste. Thank you so much for exceeding our expectations on what is possible and helping us get to this stage.

Thank you for coming back with these resources and clarifying that 5km rule for me.

Harder hit communities needed their voices to be heard, experiences documented, and grievances acknowledged to feel validated and begin to make meaning from the events that occurred. Emotions were raw, experiences in some cases traumatic, and there was a real perception of unfair targeting from specific populations. Immediate 'no strings attached' strategic communication and engagement support (as opposed to grants) was a way to help bring momentum to this and minimise further escalation. Feedback included:

"This report will help us work with our member organisations as well as the broader community to address the ongoing challenges of new and emerging COVID-19 strains, as well as the generational impact caused by the 2021 lockdowns. We stand ready to work with governments, community organisations and businesses to safeguard the health, wellbeing and financial interests of society," ICNSW Muslim Community COVID-19 Recovery Forum Summary Report.

The workshops were overwhelmingly popular and valuable to those who participated. The high demand led to an increase in workshop numbers, which maintained high participant numbers through to December. Through ongoing feedback, the workshops were tailored to the changing environment and needs to ensure that evaluations remained high.

Participants who took part in the series of three workshops reported being deluged with a 'tsunami' of information during lockdowns and this was causing stress and confusion. Community groups were being leaned on to take key roles to provide information and guidance and to allay the stress and confusion in their community, but often they were not experienced communicators. The Module 2 workshop specifically dealt with this theme.

Similarly, the psychosocial wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 were of serious concern, with people experiencing and witnessing these impacts and being worried about the potential for future recovery. The first two workshops provided insights, expertise and strategies that bolstered participants' knowledge and confidence in this area.

Further, themes such as people disengaging and isolating themselves, community division, anxiety about the re-opening of communities and returning to familiar activities, the mental health impacts of COVID-19 and lockdowns and connectedness being crucial to recovery were also highlighted in workshops.

Workshop 1: Safeguarding social cohesion during COVID-19

Most participants surveyed reported that the workshop increased their understanding of the community and psychosocial impacts of CTEs	>90%
Reported an increased understanding of strategic communications	92%
Reported an increase in their knowledge about emergency management processes	84%

Workshop 2: Understanding and responding to community wide impacts of COVID-19

92%	As evidenced by the post-workshop survey data, participants improved their understanding of CTEs
85%	Participants agreed that they gained practical ideas to support their communities
86%	Participants reported they gained practical self-care strategies because of participating in the workshop
93%	Participants found that the content of the workshop would be helpful for them in their workplace

Workshop 3: Strategic communication during COVID-19

As evidenced by the post-workshop survey data, participants increased their understanding of their audiences and stakeholders	91%
Participants increased their knowledge of how to create powerful messages	93%
Participants reported they had increased knowledge and ability to tackle misinformation	89%
Participants reported they could easily relay information they learnt in Module 2 to their colleagues	91%

Learnings

1 The daily restriction changes caused confusion, angst, and loss of trust.

There was a perception that information was withheld, rather than the day-by-day crisis decision-making process that was in place. In the absence of a more predictable, staged restriction system, transparency around the decision-making process could help to get ahead of the confusion.

2 This confusion was compounded for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

While lack of translations early in the pandemic was rectified, many still perceived there was an issue with timing and quality. There were further perceptions that culturally and linguistically diverse communities were left behind. This may have been due to the daily changes that were presumed to be translation issues.

3 Many young people (aged 12+) disengaged with COVID-19 communications as they felt they didn't reflect their experiences, making it more challenging to reach them.

Common concerns related to navigating current Public Health Orders, mental health impacts, financial stress and disengagement from study. The SRC network is a logical messenger base, however, there did not seem to be a formal mechanism to rally.

4 Misinformation and disinformation were flourishing and impacting communities.

Crisis, confusion and lack of trust in institutions and media provide the perfect environment for those who wish to fuel doubt, misinformation and conspiracies.

5 The 'tsunami' of top-down information during lockdowns caused stress and confusion.

Community-facing organisations were leaned on to take key roles but often were not experienced communicators or in communication roles. Local councils/groups became content curators spending their day trying to decipher what the changes meant for them and their audiences.

Recommendations

Based on the above lessons and the results and feedback of the approach, the following key recommendations are proposed.

1 **Formalise a crisis insights generation framework** that would be quick to activate in the event of another crisis. This includes media monitoring, social insights and stakeholder feedback. Link in with the behavioural insights unit early as part of this process.
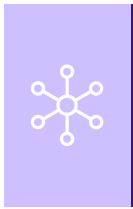
2 **Create local community crisis hubs.** In each LGA, create a small team that can be activated early during a crisis with a direct link back to NSW Government response teams. These teams could work with local emergency management committees to cover a range of responses.

With support, this group will create:

Activation and communication processes both within the LGA and as part of a broader LGA crisis communication group

Detailed audience analysis to understand local audiences and how to reach them. This includes culturally and linguistically diverse communities, young people and vulnerable individuals (for example, people living with disabilities who may not be able to access social media)

Local stakeholder mapping to understand how businesses and community groups can help amplify messages

Feedback channels to help highlight on-the-ground issues and also share examples of innovation and connectedness to help promote cohesion.

With support, representatives of each of the community hubs will form a state-level communication community of practice that can provide an opportunity to share insights, build capability and, in times of crisis, provide the formal conduit to NSW Government for information.

This group will:

- Have opportunities to attend ongoing strategic communication, collective trauma and crisis communication capability building sessions
- Participate in crisis communication scenarios to test Hub systems and processes
- In the event of a crisis, have dedicated strategic communication capacity to funnel relevant information and provide tailored support in areas of greatest need.

4 **Continue to build strategic communication capacity and capability with community groups and leaders.** Managing divisive social media, misinformation, messaging and crisis communication are all areas where groups of varying sizes and understanding of communication demonstrated an interest in learning more. Formalising a training program, including the option of an online learning platform, should be investigated to continue to build these capabilities that proved so critical during the pandemic.

5 **Investigate additional mechanisms to increase the speed of access to translations and reduce barriers.** This could include a more formal quick-to-activate crisis translation network consisting of three levels of support.

Level one: Formalise agreement with SBS for live translations of press conferences for top 10 languages.

Level two: Look at mechanisms to increase speed of access to translations and reduce red tape so translators can be activated quickly during a crisis.

Level three: Where formal translators are not available, engage with communities to identify local bilingual people and put agreements in place.

6 **Formally connect and empower student representative councils in NSW schools to quickly activate a peer messenger network.** These peer-group leaders can help shape government messaging and deliver messages to young people across the state.
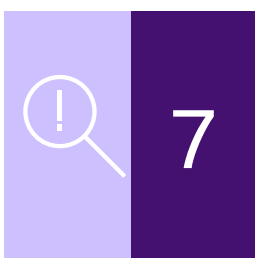
7 **Increase awareness and understanding around misinformation.** There is a need to educate the community to prevent future spread and impact of misinformation and conspiracies. Implementing a 'digital inoculation' style of awareness and behaviour campaign is shown to increase the likelihood of people thinking critically about misinformation, and therefore being less likely to share if they have concerns. This should be done prior to any new crises to prevent it from becoming as significant a problem as it has been.