

# Multicultural NSW supports the community during NSW's pandemic lockdowns

Multicultural NSW is a small agency with a big mission. It promotes community harmony and social cohesion in one of the most culturally diverse states in the world.

The agency has traditionally focused on supporting the multicultural community of NSW through community engagement and the provision of interpreting and translation services. These services were vital during the first COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 and again in the face of the Delta outbreak and lockdown this year.

During the first lockdown, Multicultural NSW recognised that refugees, asylum seekers and other temporary visa holders were vulnerable because they faced significant economic hardship.

The agency quickly responded to the changing community need by delivering NSW Government community crisis packages to vulnerable temporary visa holders. Through its policy team and with support from other agencies in the Stronger Communities cluster, Multicultural NSW worked on obtaining funding from NSW Treasury. This resulted in a \$6 million grant to support these vulnerable communities.

Multicultural NSW needed to ensure that the program was rolled out quickly, effectively and responsibly – a significant task for a small agency. It worked with the Stronger Communities cluster to increase its capacity to distribute the grant money in three weeks, and to get legal and procurement support for the grants program.

The agency also established a robust governance structure and reporting mechanism to ensure probity and accountability for the allocation of grant money. It used its strong connections with the community and non-government organisations to determine where the funding was most needed, and continued to deliver funding for 18 months.

Multicultural NSW also undertook a critical role in delivering NSW Health messaging to vulnerable linguistically diverse communities. It has casual employment relationships with more than 1,200 interpreters and translators, covering all languages spoken in NSW. The involvement of these passionate team members meant that Multicultural NSW could get health messaging into different community languages quickly.

When the Delta outbreak hit, Multicultural NSW was already set up to provide grants to vulnerable community members and rapid translation services for other government agencies.

NSW Treasury contacted the agency on the first weekend of the Delta outbreak to discuss supporting vulnerable communities through an expanded grants program. To meet the requirements of the program, Multicultural NSW partnered with the PSC and several agencies across NSW Government to quickly establish 20 new temporary positions and fill these roles with staff who were available through an inter-agency COVID-19 response mobility register.



The Delta variant was more active in Western Sydney local government areas, which had stricter lockdowns than other parts of Sydney. The speed at which the virus spread and the quickly changing lockdown rules meant that translation needs changed daily, and couldn't have been met without the agency's strong relationships with translators and NSW Health.

In addition to rapidly translating fast-changing health orders, Multicultural NSW also communicated the need to stay at home and to get vaccinated. Using its strong community relationships, it facilitated the simultaneous vaccination of 30 religious leaders. Mainstream news outlets and community-focused channels reported the event, boosting vaccine take-up in multicultural communities.

“Multicultural NSW were actively involved as a partner the setup of the popup walk-in clinic at our mosque and they were there for us every at every step of the way,” – President Muslim League of NSW

The agency also increased its engagement efforts as the crisis unfolded. It obtained critical insights from community representatives and gave the government feedback about community concerns, so that it could adapt its messaging to better connect with the community. The rapid shift in messaging put pressure on translation services but achieved the desired results.

In July 2021, Multicultural NSW partnered with Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) to live interpret the Premier's daily 11am COVID-19 update into multiple languages. This real-time interpreting of emergency messaging is a first in Australia and achieved over 2 million views.

Through its CEO, Multicultural NSW has taken on significant responsibility as part of the NSW Government's response to the Delta strain of COVID-19. It has established an intergovernmental steering committee to oversee the rollout and administration of community-focused programs, engaged extensively with the community and brought community leaders to meet with the Premier, Ministers and NSW Health representatives. This collaborative approach has supported a great connection between government and the community it represents.

Multicultural NSW is also putting together a guidance package to assist other agencies to translate government messages in the future.