



Co-designing  
and scaling  
effective COVID-19  
communication  
strategies for young  
people from culturally  
and linguistically  
diverse communities  
in Victoria

## Executive Summary

FINAL REPORT  
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# 1.0

## *Executive summary*

### 1.1 Project background and purpose

The 2020 outbreak of COVID-19 resulted in a dramatic global uptake of digital technologies across all industries and sectors, and among individuals. With the increase in physical distancing measures and lockdowns, government, non-government, educational and community organisations enhanced their digital presence to remain connected with each other and with their end users. As the crisis unfolded, it was clear that government public health messages, disseminated through a range of digital channels, were not always reaching culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Moreover, while many organisations found that digital technologies sustained connections that had been established before the pandemic, these technologies were less effective for extending networks to reach a wider audience. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed a pressing need for government and non-government organisations to better resource and build their skills and capacity for digital engagement with diverse communities, particularly those that rely on a number of digital platforms to engage with information.

This project sought to examine digital communication and engagement with a focus on CALD young people and the key organisations in Victoria working with them. In addition to conducting interviews with young people and non-government organisations, we partnered with five organisations working with CALD young people to advance a participatory, inclusive and digitally innovative approach to the design of a social media digital playbook. The playbooks were developed to encourage digital engagement and contained a series of strategies (or plays) that CALD youth-focused organisations can use to give young people a greater role and voice in engaging their peers through the digital technologies that they already have (mobile phones and tablets) and use (such as WhatsApp and Instagram). This approach placed young people at the forefront of engagement strategies.

The project comprised three phases, which are outlined below.

**PHASE 1** involved interviews with CALD young people in Victoria aged between 18 and 25 to explore their COVID-19 information needs, attitudes, understandings and behavioural intentions. The CALD target groups were identified by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and included young people from the following ethnic groups:

- Nepalese
- Colombian
- Indian
- Sudanese (Arabic speakers)
- Lebanese
- Iraqi.

**PHASE 2** comprised interviews with organisations working with CALD young people in Victoria. The focus of these interviews was to better understand how these organisations delivered information to, and communicated with, their end users during the COVID-19 crisis and in the COVID-19 recovery period.

**PHASE 3** involved working with organisations to co-develop playbooks, comprising a set of digital plays, that empowered bicultural workers<sup>1</sup> from five organisations to engage young people using social media activities around emerging topics related to the impact of COVID-19 on their communities. The five CALD organisations involved in the development of the digital playbooks were:

- the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)
- YLab
- the Huddle
- Australian Karen Organisation (AKO)
- Migrante Melbourne.

These playbooks are available on the DFFH Youth Central website at [playbook.actionlab.dev](https://playbook.actionlab.dev)

## 1.2 Key findings

The three phases of the project uncovered key insights into CALD young people's experiences of COVID-19 *and* concerns for the future. Alongside the experiences of CALD young people, the project revealed nuanced understandings of the organisations that serviced, and worked with, young people. Four overarching themes emerged from this research.

### Discerning credible COVID-19 evidence

The young people interviewed in Phase 1 relied on a range of sources to access COVID-19 information and health-related messages, including the mainstream media, Victorian government websites, social media, and instant messaging platforms. For most participants, these were trusted sources. Similar strategies were employed by the representatives of the organisations interviewed in Phase 2, who were often trusted bicultural workers or leaders in their diasporic communities. Many participants across both Phases 1 and 2 shared COVID-19 information with friends, family and their relevant communities and through their social media and instant messaging accounts. However, some participants expressed scepticism about unofficial sources and undertook extensive 'fact-checking' practices to ensure appropriate compliance. Only a few participants engaged with community organisations to access critical COVID-19 information. Temporary visa holders were less likely to engage with these organisations.

Overall, the findings from Phase 1 and Phase 2 demonstrate the important role of the digital sphere for young people and bicultural workers/community leaders in enabling them to access information and, in many instances, communicate and share this information with their networks. Thus, there is a need to ensure that young people have the requisite skills to evaluate the reliability of the information they access, which in turn may reduce the spread of misinformation among this cohort.

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<sup>1</sup> A bicultural worker – also referred to as a bilingual, outreach or multicultural worker – is a person who works with specific people or communities where they share cultural experiences. Bicultural workers are employed to use their cultural and linguistic knowledge to communicate between these communities and their employer (Boughtwood et al. 2011; Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2011).

## Youth-led and co-designed communication strategies

Phase 3 highlighted that there is a clear and pressing need for support, especially for organisations that work directly with CALD young people (including hardly reached young people), to develop and refine strategies related to the production and dissemination of information using digital media. Effective engagement with hardly reached young people is a challenge that many organisations and community leaders face. This challenge was intensified during the pandemic. Offering support not only to youth-facing organisations but also to CALD young people themselves is critical to ensuring that mutual trust and respect are achieved. Creating tasks that are youth-led and co-designed is key to successful engagement practices that can extend beyond crises. Communication strategies will likely have greater reach and impact when young people from CALD communities in Victoria, and the organisations engaging with them, have the skills and resources to access, engage with and make sense of important information.

## Understanding organisational ecologies and networks

During the crisis, the organisations interviewed in Phase 2 maintained ties with CALD young people, and many developed new relationships with other organisations. From an organisational perspective, these relationships between organisations were critical to ensuring wider reach, especially in relation to the dissemination of COVID-19 information. The COVID-19 recovery phase has provided an opportunity to continue these collaborations between organisations, allowing for more co-designed digital innovations and ensuring that communities are reached more widely. Critical to supporting these collaborations is better understanding of the organisational ecologies that exist within the sector, which will provide an overall capture of how organisations are networked, and the type of reach and impact they have when they collaborate. As a result, establishing more opportunities for organisations to work together, and for specific organisations to connect based on their remits, resources and skills, is essential for wider reach to CALD communities. Moreover, the organisations interviewed are in a key position to leverage their existing networks to develop reciprocal communication strategies that are situated within the hybrid landscape we will be entering in the future, which will involve digital technologies but will also rely on the in-person engagements that are invaluable for maintaining trust and shared values between organisations and young people. In this regard, many organisations are limited by their skill levels and/or resources, including personnel, funding and material equipment (such as laptops, tablets and internet modems).

## Peer-to-peer learning networks for young people

Across all phases of the project, it was evident that for information to have meaning it needs to be disseminated to, and embedded within, networks that are based on adequate representation (among CALD young people and facilitators who have had lived experiences of challenges that are relatable to young people), relationships of trust, and shared values. It is also important to create conditions for young people to develop learning networks with each other. These collaborations are beneficial as they involve young people learning from each other and they ensure that young people's voices are heard in the wider community. While much of this project focused on the ways that young people used digital technologies during the pandemic, the current recovery phase offers opportunities for in-person collaborations to flourish, which will allow young people to address the social issues facing their communities and maintain trusting relationships with each other in the process.

## 1.3 Strategic opportunities

Drawing on the findings from all phases of this project, below we offer four strategic opportunities in alignment with the key findings, for uptake by local and state governments working with CALD young people and/or organisations that service migrant communities. Please see the main body of the report (Section 3.o) for the details of the complete set of strategic opportunities.

*Strategic Opportunity 1:* Empower young people and bicultural workers to be active communicators who engage with, and share, credible information.

*Strategic Opportunity 2:* Develop engagement strategies that enhance existing relationships of trust.

*Strategic Opportunity 3:* Understanding organisational ecologies: Conduct a stocktake of organisations that serve CALD communities to understand their remit and the nuanced ways in which they are networked.

*Strategic Opportunity 4:* Develop stronger peer-to-peer networks to strengthen collective organisational capacities.

## 1.4 Actionable steps

The strategic opportunities above inform a number of actionable steps that can be taken by the state government and organisations that work with CALD young people. These steps focus on empowering young people, empowering the organisations that work with them, and creating a knowledge base of effective digital engagement strategies that can be used for both everyday issues and in times of crisis. For the full details of each actionable step, see Section 4.o in the body of the report.

### Empowering CALD young people

1. **Conduct a baseline study to better understand the existing digital literacies** and capabilities of CALD young people, to scope their literacies, platforms/modes of engagement and points of information consumption during times of crisis (formal and informal).
2. **Create learning pathways for CALD young people, including hardly reached young people**, which involve training in digital engagement technologies where young people are explicitly taught to discern what information is trustworthy and accurate.
3. Create a plan to specifically **engage hardly reached CALD young people** with skill- and trust-building activities. This can be achieved by **elevating the practice of storytelling** among CALD young people as a means to facilitate the co-design of participatory government and community messaging and information sharing.
4. **Create new employment opportunities for young CALD leaders** to engage with their broader community on important issues that matter to them.

### Empowering CALD organisations

5. **Co-design engagements** with youth workers from CALD community organisations so that digital and in-person processes are configured to align with the lived experiences and digital capacities of the young people they work with.

6. Implement **targeted training sessions** for emerging and established bicultural workers and community leaders to strengthen their digital communication and engagement skills, including during times of crisis.
7. **Build on or develop funding initiatives** that are specifically designed for organisations to collaborate on particular project or program development or implementation that are focused on digital technologies/engagements.
8. **Connect organisations to build partnerships**, such as joining established organisations with newer or more informal/grassroots organisations to fill certain gaps related to skills, resources, reach and knowledge.

### Creating a knowledge base for effective digital engagement practices

9. Conduct a **baseline study** of organisations that work with CALD young people to **map their ecologies**.
10. Re-engage with organisations that work with CALD communities to **identify the digital strategies they used that effectively enhanced networks, trust and the sharing of information** during the initial phases of the COVID-19 crisis and the recovery period. **Seek out information on the digital engagement strategies that did not achieve the intended objectives** to identify practices that are unlikely to work in response to future crises.

