

# Towards active engagement: Understanding how organisations are using technology to connect with diverse groups during COVID-19

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### **Acknowledgements**

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## Executive summary

As a result of the significant lockdowns and restrictions in place to stop the spread of COVID-19, governments, non-government organisations (NGOs), and industry have quickly transitioned their practices to online platforms. For organisations who work with diverse groups, this transition further amplified the existing technological barriers related to access, affordability, and proficiency.

This report examines how organisations working with diverse communities use digital communication and online platforms to bridge social cohesion and inclusion during crisis events. Amid the COVID-19 lockdown periods in Australia, researchers from the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre interviewed 23 key stakeholders who work directly with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Victoria. These included NGOs, educational institutions, community stakeholders and leaders, advocacy groups, multicultural organisations, local government representatives, and peak bodies. The interviews with these stakeholders provided deeper understandings of how program and service delivery modes shifted, how technology was harnessed, the strategies employed to connect with diverse groups, and the opportunities and challenges that emerged when transitioning services into the online sphere.

This report presents these results followed by a discussion of immediately relevant and applicable next steps for stakeholders who work with diverse communities. These organisations have strong working relationships with/to diverse communities and they are trusted by those communities. The COVID-19 pandemic has placed additional pressure on these stakeholders to maintain and build intercultural engagement and inclusion during a period of physical distancing and social isolation. Concerns have also arisen around CALD communities – their access to, and interpretation of, information, engagement with each other and relevant organisations, and their vulnerability to the coronavirus itself.

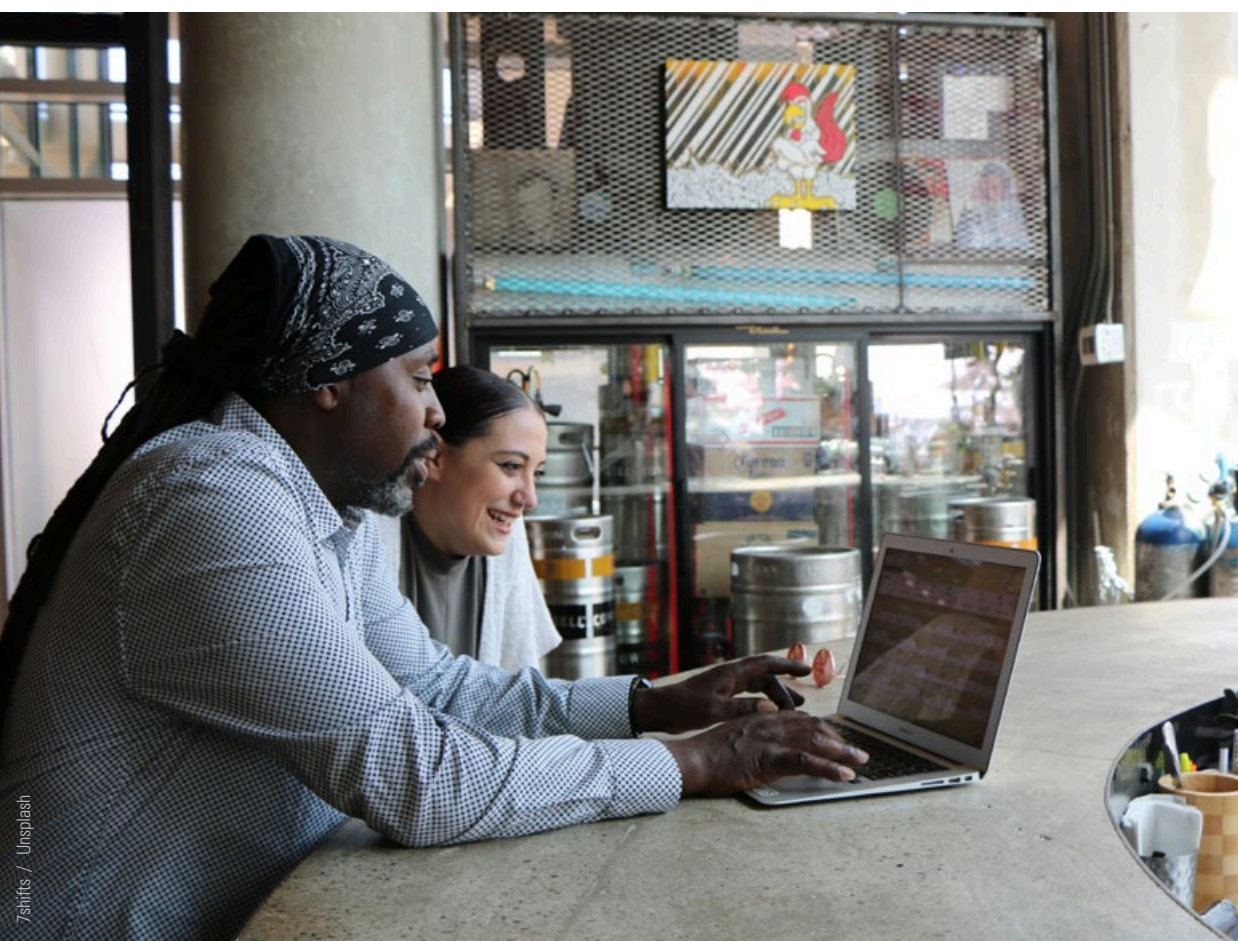
The premise of this project stemmed from a need to better understand how organisations and community leaders maintained and built intercultural engagements between CALD community members during a period of physical distancing and social isolation. Here, intercultural engagement refers to the connections that emerge between individuals from different cultural, ethnic, and/or religious backgrounds.



The aim of the project was to **examine how organisations use digital technologies to service, communicate, and engage with CALD communities during COVID-19.**

Alongside this aim were four interlinking research questions:

- What strategies were employed by organisations to communicate with CALD communities and community members who are digitally included *and* excluded?
- What platforms are organisations using to pursue intercultural engagement between different CALD groups?
- How are organisations implementing modes of *active* engagement with the communities they service?
- How will digital innovations sustain beyond the pandemic, and what is needed to ensure they continue?



# Background literature

## Connectedness: digital inclusion and exclusion

Technology – including interactive peer-to-peer and information delivery platforms – can be valuable for enhancing communication and engagement. The 2016 Australian Census revealed that 83.2 per cent of households had at least one person access the internet from the dwelling (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017b).

From this figure, further supported by the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (Barraket et al., 2019), it is evident that a majority of the Australian population has access to the internet. Moreover, a significant number of people also have access to mobile devices. Internet access and proficiency have resulted in better connections through social networking, but businesses, NGOs, and governments also yield multiple benefits by offering digitally-oriented services together with traditional ones (Firmstone & Coleman, 2015; Borg et al., 2019).

Despite increasing online and digital connectivity, in Australia and globally, there are many groups who remain “digitally excluded”. Digital exclusion relates to those who are unable to utilise ‘the wide suite of available digital opportunities’ due to limited access, affordability, or proficiency (Borg, et al., 2019, p. 1320). More recently, researchers have moved towards using the term “digital inclusion/exclusion” instead of “digital divide” (van Dijk, 2006). Digital inclusion acknowledges that ‘the simple binary description of a divide fails to do justice to the complex reality of various people’s differing access and usage of digital technology’ (Warschauer, 2003, p. 44).

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people in Australia fall along multiple points of the digital inclusion trajectory. Academic literature on the critical role of technology in migrants’ lives is increasing (Fortunati et al., 2011; Greschke, 2011; Alam & Imran, 2015). On a micro scale, research has demonstrated that a significant proportion of migrants settling in host countries have high technological capability; they can apply these skills to maintain connections to their home countries by using the internet and mobile devices that support peer-to-peer platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Messenger, Viber, Skype, and WeChat, for example (Felton, 2014; 2015). However, there are also CALD groups who face technological barriers related to internet access, affordability, and proficiency.

The Australian Digital Inclusion Index (Barraket et al., 2019) noted the following regarding CALD people's digital skills:

- their engagement in functional activities (such as emailing, internet banking, online transactions) was considerably below the national average; and
- their use of the internet to search for information regarding education, employment, health, and essential government services was well above the national average.

These findings, particularly the latter point, are unsurprising for recently arrived migrants who generally have more contact with government services and agencies. However, navigating the internet can be difficult for CALD individuals who have limited English proficiency. As such, some CALD people may be challenged by the expectation to increase their “digital literacy” while simultaneously navigating new, and sometimes precarious, tenures in Australia. Moreover, COVID-19 has further underscored the technological barriers faced by CALD people; there is a need to address digital exclusion and better understand the potential for organisations and stakeholders to facilitate digital upskilling, inclusion, and intercultural engagement.

## The role of organisations to facilitate (digital) inclusion and intercultural engagement

Along with people's rising technological proficiency and internet access, local government, non-government, educational, and community organisations have increased their digital presence in information and service delivery (see Ratnam et al., 2020).

For example, NGOs are using websites and social media to connect with communities and disseminating online surveys for community consultations (Hanson et al., 2018). While this shift is valuable, and benefits the digitally included, these approaches lack reciprocal, or two-way, engagement with communities.

In this context, “reciprocal engagement” refers to the two-way interactions between an organisation and their end-user(s) – that is, interactions where end users can communicate with organisations and vice versa. Existing modes of connecting with communities often rely on a one-way communication model, however, as we suggest in this report, organisations would benefit from two-way communication models.

In turn, two-way interactions could provide openings for digitally based intercultural engagement and more active engagement between organisations and end users.

Researchers have also identified some barriers related to the use of technology in primary, secondary, and tertiary education sectors (McLoughlin, 2001; Liu et al., 2010) and a need to be culturally sensitive during the design stages of courses to allow





for active engagement. Active engagement must also be pursued by community organisations and leaders. These stakeholders play a fundamental role in bringing community members together.

Community organisations and leaders can facilitate participation and connection between diverse groups – what we would characterise as “intercultural engagement” (Wali et al., 2018). These connections are often formed in face-to-face settings – for example, through weekly playgroup meetings and neighbourhood/community events. As a result, the use of digital platforms to facilitate such intercultural engagement has remained largely dormant. For CALD groups who are digitally excluded, the uptake of technology to connect with organisations and individuals may be undesirable or too challenging. Yet, there is potential to create more participatory, inclusive, and digitally innovative approaches for organisations and stakeholders to provide information to, and equip technological skills for, CALD communities. Additionally, there is scope to engender opportunities for active digital engagement that extends beyond a one-way communication model.



## Project methods and context

This project examined the development and implementation of strategies and practices relating to sustainable digital engagement with CALD communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also considers if these strategies and practices have the potential to facilitate intercultural connections between diverse groups.

This project had two phases. The first comprised a rapid review of the literature with the aim of synthesising knowledge on technology and intercultural engagement. The second phase of the project involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders currently working with diverse communities. Further detail on each approach is provided below.

### Rapid literature review

Phase one involved a rapid review of the literature focused on the use of technology in three sectors: NGOs/local governments, education, and community organisations.

We also reviewed publications produced by key government agencies, peak bodies, community or grassroots organisations, and advocacy groups and reviewed their websites for examples of digital engagement. The strategy for this review involved using the Web of Science database and Google Scholar platform to search for academic literature. To ensure a comprehensive search, we reviewed 59 academic and grey publications to synthesise the interplay between digital technologies and intercultural engagement across the key sectors of interest. We used keywords listed in each article we reviewed to advance our search followed by a rigorous citation search in each article. The criteria for the review included publications that addressed topics related to technologies, digital engagement, and online communication combined with sector-based keywords including community groups/organisations, NGOs, educational institutions, local councils, and then phrases such as “intercultural engagement”, “intercultural dialogue”, “migrant engagement”, and “diasporas”. Critically reviewing this suite of literature – which included 36 articles – revealed that the use of digital platforms, communication strategies, and technologies within these three sectors remain largely informative, rather than interactive or engaging (Ratnam et al., 2020). A dearth of published research provided an urgent need to investigate further and connect with key stakeholders in this space.

## Interviews

To supplement the rapid review, phase two involved 23 in-depth interviews (approximately 45-60 minutes each) with organisations and community leaders who work directly with CALD communities nationally and in Victoria.

Many of the stakeholders interviewed were either longstanding collaborators with researchers at the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre, or were identified by the research team as those that the Centre wanted to connect with. Identifying these additional stakeholders ensured representation across a wide range of sectors including grassroots, non-government, and community organisations working with targeted CALD groups, local governments, and the health, social support, religious, and education sectors. The interviews comprised questions related to how their service and program delivery had shifted, along with how they adapted communication and engagement to/with CALD groups. Participants were also asked to reflect on the challenges faced, new opportunities afforded, and best practices developed as they related to digital engagement both during COVID-19 and how these could sustain in a post-pandemic world.

The information and quotes presented in this report from the stakeholders interviewed have been de-identified in line with the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee approval received to undertake this research.



## Case study – Victoria

Victoria is one of the most diverse states in Australia, and has increasingly become home to migrants from non-English speaking countries such as China, Malaysia, and India.

From the 2016 Australian Census, 49.1 per cent of Victorians were born overseas or had a parent who was born overseas; 40.2 per cent of Greater Melbourne was born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017a). These sizeable figures of diversity indicate that modes of communication should be diverse, interactive, and wide reaching. As such, a majority of stakeholders interviewed for this project were either located, had counterparts, or serviced CALD communities in Victoria, Australia.

This project commenced in March 2020; at this time, the number of COVID-19 cases and levels of community transmission across Australia remained relatively low compared to the rest of the world. Since March, federal and state governments and other agencies have attempted to mitigate the impact of the outbreak through communication and messaging that address community needs and support the adherence to preventative measures (physical distancing, sanitising, isolation) and essential advice (regarding the safety of women and children experiencing family violence, for example). Such communication and messaging continue to be of critical importance, particularly in Victoria where stage four restrictions were implemented in August as a result of a second surge of outbreaks. This “second wave” has attracted considerable commentary that has challenged how effective the messaging and information communication has been, both by governments and organisations, particularly to CALD communities (ABC Radio National Breakfast, 2020; Dalzell, 2020). As such, ongoing debates about whether these communities significantly contributed to rising case numbers continue. These debates have revealed what scholars have known for some time – that some migrant communities are over-represented in the service industry, live in overcrowded dwellings, and are more susceptible of contracting the virus (Tietz, 2017; Nasreen & Ruming, 2019; Kluge et al., 2020). Thus, this report comes at a time when: a) understanding how stakeholders and CALD communities are engaging during pandemic; and b) identifying sustainable strategies for digital inclusion into the future is critical.

## Information communication and engagement strategies

Connecting with CALD communities fits squarely within the remit of all the organisations interviewed for this research. The results presented below reveal that there were varied attempts to continue communication and engagement through digital platforms.

However, there are still complexities that require further examination, particularly regarding arguments that centre CALD communities as significant contributors to the second surge of COVID-19 outbreaks in Victoria. Indeed, there are many reasons why public health messages may not reach CALD communities, further amplifying a communication gap between governments/organisations and digitally excluded people. This lack of communication and engagement may have little to do with the messages procured and delivered by organisations. Rather, it may be due to the realities that some vulnerable groups are still overlooked in the provision of accurate information.

In this section, we present findings on the modes of information communication and engagement strategies employed by stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic (rather than the content of the information and messages themselves). We have separated these discussions into two key sections: we present identified strategies that were employed during the pandemic and then which of these are working effectively. Following these results, we suggest future steps that can enhance information communication (including procurement and delivery) and active, participatory, and inclusive engagement between CALD communities and organisations. From the results, there is scope to use digital platforms to facilitate more intercultural connections between community members that extend well beyond the pandemic context.

In this report, the terms “information communication” and “engagement” are interrelated yet distinctly different. They are defined as the following:

- **information communication:** the act of passing on, or conveying, information from one person/place to another. This communication can occur using spoken or written mediums. It is often one-way/one-to-many streams of sharing; and
- **engagement:** active participation between stakeholders and/or individuals for a range of purposes including information sharing/communication and decision-making processes. Engagement involves two-way interactions and exchanges that should be inclusive and participatory (see also Norris et al., 2017).



## What is being done?

The pandemic presented an unique opportunity for organisations to rapidly transition to online and digital forms of connecting with their target groups and clients. Information is largely communicated via online platforms, and there is a greater emphasis placed on organisations to pursue active engagement as part of their program and service delivery.

While information communication and digital engagement are the focus of many initiatives, organisations (and individuals) have taken a mixed approach to connect with community members – that is, they have employed conventional *and* digital communication methods to procure/disseminate information in an attempt to reach those who may be digitally excluded. Organisations have also maintained contact and engaged with communities using digital peer-to-peer platforms. Below, we present excerpts from the interviews that highlight the different information communication and engagement strategies employed by organisations.

Many organisations turned to conventional platforms to disseminate/procure information and maintain contact with those CALD and digitally excluded individuals through **telephone calls and text messages, local radio, TV, and newspapers**, all in multiple and preferred languages:

- ‘We put in place a phone contact schedule where people [from our organisation] would ring up once a week and just check on that person to see if everything was okay’ (Stakeholder A).
- ‘There was an increase in... community radio, so, you know, Islamic Force Radio [and local television] Channel 31 as well, came on board and started doing... live services on Friday as well’ (Stakeholder Q).
- ‘So, with [a number of organisations] ... because the schools were closed... their workers and teachers and welfare staff all switched to calling families... about twice a week. The families that they were really worried about, they were calling a bit more regularly, maybe every second day. They were connecting people to services for material aids and getting packages of groceries delivered and things like that. So... making sure people eat... and then there was also getting people connected to the internet to... things we were [also] worried about [which included]: [people] may not have had enough credit on their phones to stay on the phone to Centrelink for many hours’ (Stakeholder B).
- ‘I find that most of the women, if English is not their first language... then they prefer to use SMS to communicate. I’ve been doing a lot of SMS message[s] to them... I input in the SMS so that they can have [it] as a reference, so they can use the Google translate to translate [the SMS] to their own language’ (Stakeholder G).



We're also seeing a return to online community platforms, such as Facebook groups... particularly from younger people such as international students.

Stakeholder F

Aligning with the points above, one stakeholder highlighted challenges associated with connecting with groups, in a health context, who may rely on conventional methods of face-to-face communication:

- 'The virtual world may offer the opportunity for more people to be connected into telehealth. But it might exclude a lot of people too... a lot of people who have mental health or disability issues are on [a] very low income, they can't afford smartphones, don't have internet, can't afford computers, therefore, don't really have good internet connections for being able to connect. And if people have [a connection]... that's [not for] people of all backgrounds. So, one of the issues, of course, has been around access to information in language[s]' (Stakeholder M).

Some organisations used **their websites alongside social media, especially Facebook**, to present up-to-date COVID-19 information. This method was considered an effective one-way information communication stream by several participants.

- 'I truly believe we were one of the first organisations to go out with a website. We did it in English first and then it was... getting some popularity... [then] we got an assessment of what languages our clients spoke and then we also looked from a digital perspective, what are the top 10 languages actually using the site? We then also ran a social media campaign, obviously to create awareness of the website and did a lot of pop-ups on our [Stakeholder H] site, so you could see that it was there, and now we're getting around 8,000 people a month... so it's really effective, particularly given our larger site attracts only like 14,000-17,000 and our Facebook page attracts 14,000' (Stakeholder H).
- 'We're [also] seeing, again anecdotally, a return to online community platforms, such as Facebook groups, and... broader, more accessible, [and] less closed platforms particularly from younger people, such as international students, who... up until recently had left those platforms, or weren't engaging with those platforms, and were... involved in much more discrete platforms and apps like Snapchat and TikTok' (Stakeholder F).
- 'I think what [the pandemic has] done is sped up people's need to make sure that [their] websites are up to date' (Stakeholder I).
- 'We heard community leaders doing this; they were [verbally] recording their own messages and then posting them on Facebook so that people could access them, not in a written material, but they could hear what the [social isolation and distancing] regulations were' (Stakeholder J).

There has been a clear uptake of **online engagement through webinars, seminars, meetings, and training sessions delivered via Microsoft Teams, Zoom, and Webex, and sometimes through peer-to-peer social media platforms and YouTube tutorials.** These have been part of organisations' program and service delivery. Some of these methods have facilitated both two-way interactions and intercultural engagement, for example, through the virtual playgroup.

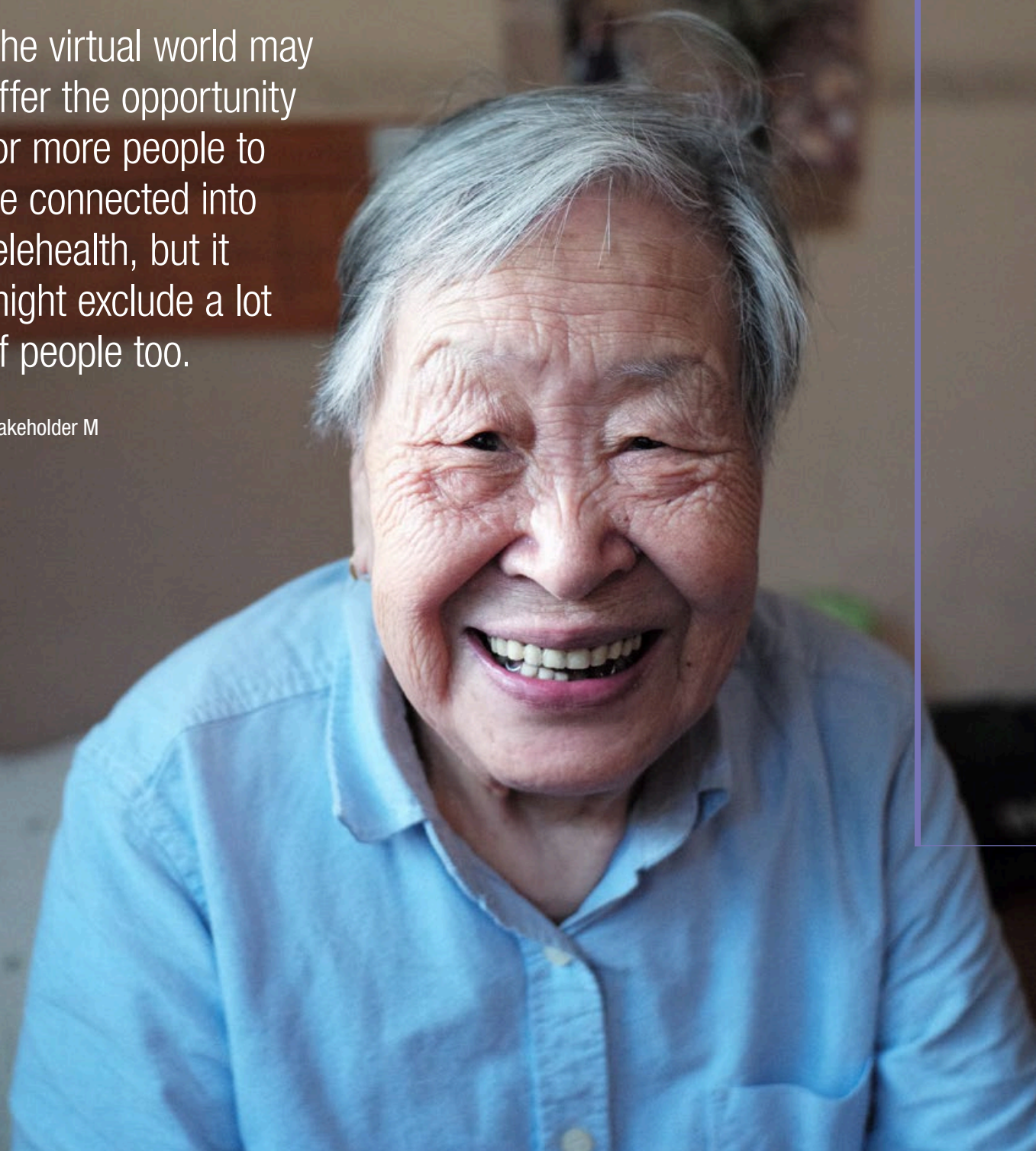
- 'Our playgroup is now being delivered into homes online by our playgroup coordinator [who] runs it from her lounge room, basically, and has all her props and her guitar and everything. She spent a good week or so teaching parents on how to get online using Zoom' (Stakeholder A).
- '...Every Thursday, 6pm, we have a Guest Mentor who is talking about a specific topic that is not only relevant to COVID-19 but also relevant to our young members that they're able to navigate themselves during the lockdown... So, with the Guest Mentor series, what we have are six main topics. We decided to do this one on Instagram Live because we identified that most of our members are interacting in lockdown on Instagram. I mean, as you can see, especially with the movement now, a lot of the drive is coming from Instagram and Twitter' (Stakeholder D).
- '[Another activity] is a regular month community gathering which is called "the feast". It's held once every Baha'i month which is once every 19 days and it's like the core community gathering of each community. So, we have put the feast online and we have found the attendance has been quite good and not significantly different from what we were getting in person' (Stakeholder E).
- '...one week we thought "well, why don't we do a festival, like an online festival that's live, like full of live events, where people can actually interact?" But we [would] still keep that place-based focus... we got 10 expressions of interest from people wanting to host something [via Zoom]. So we...hosted a couple of dance classes. We got a yoga studio that wanted to host a yoga class, a girl who has worked in a Chinese holistic health clinic who wanted to run an acupuncture workshop. We had a cellist as well' (Stakeholder P).
- 'We are now offering webinars, we offer podcasts, and a lot of introductory training has gone online. So, I think the majority of our work now has gone online' (Stakeholder C).





The virtual world may offer the opportunity for more people to be connected into telehealth, but it might exclude a lot of people too.

Stakeholder M



Several organisations also harnessed **‘informal’ digital platforms such as WhatsApp, open and closed Facebook groups, Viber, WeChat, Messenger, and Instagram to connect with CALD people**. CALD community members are familiar with these platforms, since they are often used to contact their families/friends in their home countries (Felton, 2014). These platforms provide two-way interactions that enable instant modes of information communication, and in some cases, the delivery of programs/services.

- ‘[The use of] WhatsApp, which is where we find a lot of culturally and linguistically diverse communities are engaging, [has increased]’ (Stakeholder F).
- ‘We also launched WeChat to reach out to the Chinese [and] Malaysian communities and that has really picked up, you’re right, WhatsApp. We’re looking at [connecting with communities through] WhatsApp’ (Stakeholder H).
- ‘...because I can speak Chinese... then I manage the WeChat app. So I can use the WeChat to contact the Chinese women’ (Stakeholder G).
- ‘We had Victoria Police and community leaders and religious leaders deliver joint video messages addressing the rising issue of... domestic, family violence and these messages were sort of distributed digitally and via Zoom and through a whole range of other social media platforms’ (Stakeholder J).

## What is working?

While most of the organisations interviewed have increasingly shifted to online information communication through the use of websites and some social media outlets, the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed for their entire core business engagement to be delivered online at rapid speed. Many stakeholders highlighted the benefits of these methods of communication and engagement.

### **Digital platforms have allowed for rapid information communication,**

in multiple languages, with individual community members. For example, organisations tapped into digital (and often peer-to-peer) platforms to have more instant and accessible correspondence, predominantly as it related to distributing important COVID-19 information.

- ‘That’s why all community organisations like ourselves got into the development of YouTube clips. [These] localised YouTube clips [were released] very quickly to ensure that we had timely and accurate information to link to the right people’ (Stakeholder A).
- ‘[A community leader] would record an update and then put that out to a WhatsApp group and he would do that in like... five languages, so he would do that in multiple languages’ (Stakeholder K).





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We also launched WeChat to reach out to the Chinese and Malaysian communities, and that has really picked up.

Stakeholder H

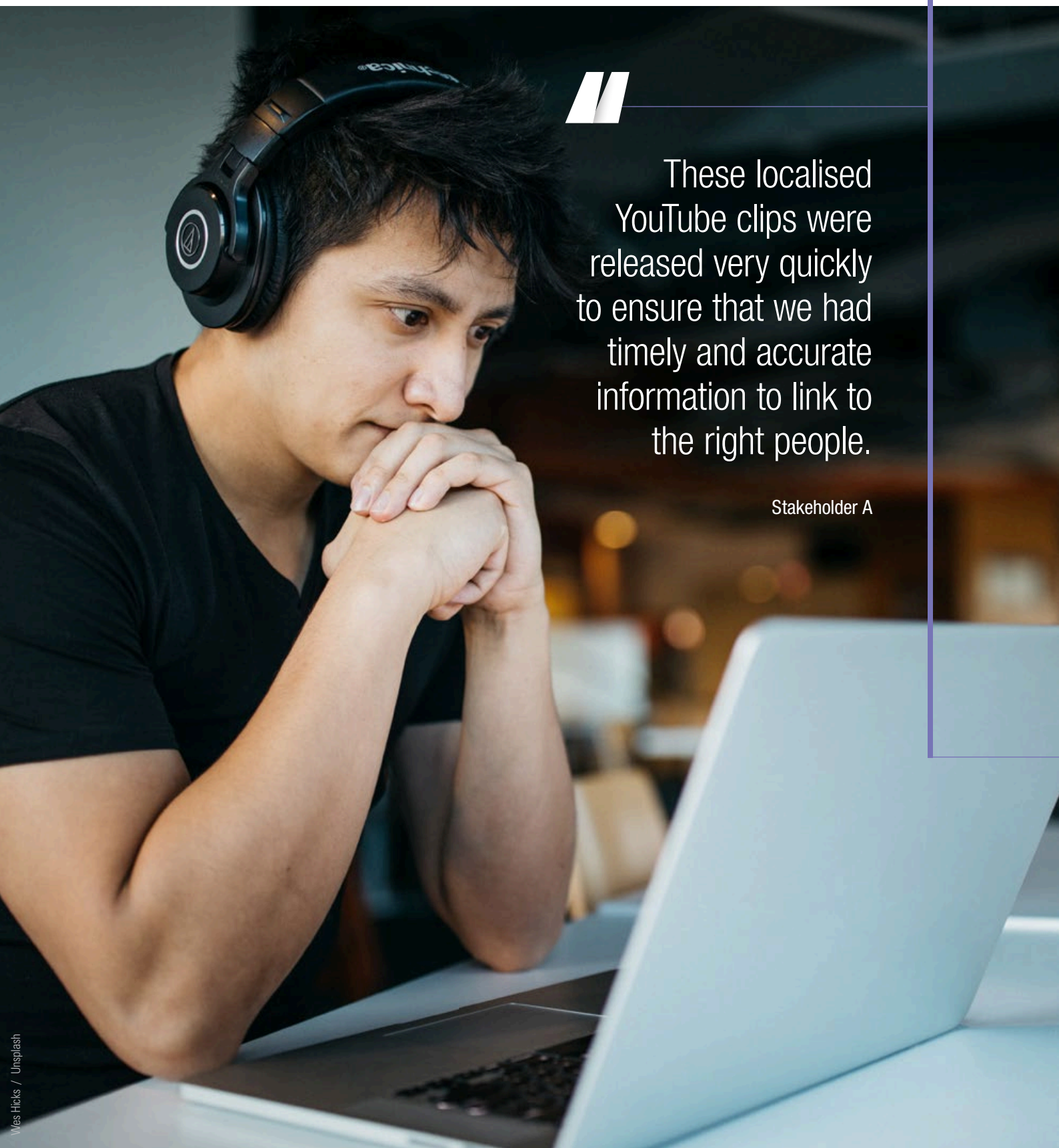
There were **more individuals tuning into webinars and online events**, especially those that focused on relevant issues. These events are becoming more accessible and relevant to the wider population.

- 'We actually tap into the platforms and [social] media [applications] where we can access [a] huge number of women or listeners and, you know, people that read articles on these digital platforms that we could not ever imagine that we would reach' (Stakeholder D).
- '[There has been a] whole lot of webinars that you could download at any time. That, I thought was just terrific, and they've had great numbers of people turning up to them which I think's been really terrific' (Stakeholder I).
- '[Our organisational members have] really seen even greater engagement in their projects and programs as a result of just that ease and flexibility of them being able to engage whenever they feel like it. They can always jump on and, you know, message someone on a Facebook group' (Stakeholder L).

The pandemic has increased geographical connectivity and reach; **organisations have connected and interacted with more regional, remote, interstate, and international communities** as well as other sectors, researchers, and community leaders to deliver programs/services and share information. Online communication and engagement were cost effective measures, where travel related costs have been saved, but they are still able to benefit from the programs and services delivered.

- 'I think, what we've realised is that the digital space has potential for us to be able to connect with all our other members who may have moved interstate and also overseas' (Stakeholder N).
- 'This is a really really good way of accessing very remote communities that live in regional Victoria... or we could with our health education program, we could never reach communities that live in other states' (Stakeholder D).
- 'We will continue [delivering programs online] only because we will see it as a way of connecting with regional and rural communities being a state-wide service' (Stakeholder C).
- 'I think one of the biggest successes out of all of this is the collaborative element. I think, [previously we were] missing a high degree of collaboration across the community sector. So it's no longer just, you know, you're in it for yourself, everyone is trying to work together, which is great, and seeing that across the multicultural and multi-faith sector[s], whether that's through the multi-faith advisory group or through other services, we're seeing more and more the sector come together because they recognise that they can't really go it alone, and we can try and support each other' (Stakeholder Q).





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Stakeholder A



The other thought that comes to mind is the importance of working with bicultural community workers who are telling us, as an organisation, what we need to do.



Stakeholder B



Organisations and community leaders have benefitted from the **professional development opportunities related to digital communication and engagement**.

For example, more bicultural workers, health educators/champions, and inclusion officers along with community members have upskilled their technological capabilities since they were a critical conduit between digitally excluded CALD community members and the organisations themselves.

- ‘The other thought [that] comes to mind is the importance of working with bicultural community workers who are telling us, as an organisation, what we need to do’. The pandemic provided an opportunity for this organisation to upskill their bicultural workers to then train community members: ‘Rohingya people, they don’t know how to use the computers and... we did one... event through to the internet. So, we [held an] ATO (Australian Taxation Office) session. At that time, I talk[ed] with the community [about how] to join to this event. We can’t meet in person. So, we try to help to the people, and send them message[s] and [speak] on the phone, [guiding them to] download this app, and [telling them] the password ID... [to] click this one, click that, click that. We [took] two weeks to grow to this session. So, we did work very hard. Now [Rohingya] people are learning’ (Stakeholder B).
- ‘[We have] digitally pre-recorded training sessions of a program we run called “Cyberparent”, which educates family members on the use of the internet and how to work with their young people on the internet’ (Stakeholder J).

**Some organisations implemented participatory engagement approaches;** for example, some organisations set up digital facilitations for particular cultural/ethnic groups to meet, socialise, and communicate information.

- ‘I suppose if we have [these] platforms, how many communities out there have... chat platforms or groups on WhatsApp, on Facebook, on Instagram, or WeChat? For example, [the] Chinese group everywhere that we can tap in and send our messages [on WeChat]’ (Stakeholder D).

## Challenges, best practices, and next steps

The transformation to online services offered by organisations, alongside efforts to provide tailored and accurate information, highlights a move towards a hybrid future that will fuse the face-to-face with the digital. Yet, there are current gaps in process and practice.

Debates in both the media and in politics, about whether public health messages and information related to COVID-19 are reaching vulnerable and digitally excluded people in Victoria, suggest significant limitations in current engagement strategies.

The results presented in this report reveal that organisations maintained contact with their existing CALD groups and attempted to reach regional populations and other groups that may not have connected with them previously. However, their use of technology was limited to immediate service provision and information dissemination. Reaching digitally excluded groups or facilitating intercultural engagement with individuals not already linked to the organisation proved difficult for some. In this final section, we discuss what more is needed to overcome challenges and provide suggested steps, drawn from our evidence base of best practices, that organisations can incorporate towards more active and intercultural engagement in future endeavours.

### What more is needed?

The COVID-19 pandemic has required a rapid uptake of technology by community leaders and organisations, sometimes without the most updated knowledge and skills on how to use certain digital platforms.

Given that digital engagement is expected to continue beyond the pandemic, we suggest that **formal training and capacity building** are developed into organisations' strategic plans. For example, it would be prudent for community leaders and organisations to ensure that those who do work directly with CALD community members, such as bicultural workers, inclusion officers, and health educators, have relevant and updated skills to use online engagement platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex, and Google Hangouts.





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Stakeholder J

Certainly, there are still individuals who are excluded from receiving accurate information. While it is not solely the responsibility of community organisations, peak bodies, and NGOs to reach these groups, **there is a need to better understand what messages and information are disseminated by organisations, and then how they are received by the end user, interpreted, and acted upon.** It is imperative that we identify barriers to effective communication that hinder the uptake of health behaviours that prevent the spread of the coronavirus. There is also capacity to **develop a set of strategies that could include digitally excluded CALD people** who may not have proficient English literacy to seek out these skills easily. For example, Stakeholder B above partnered with bicultural workers to assist Rohingya community members with getting online. Creating these strategies also builds capacity among bicultural workers and inclusion officers who have established rapport with community members.

Following the intensity of the pandemic period, **organisations should undertake evaluations** that measure their employed strategies related to information communication and digital engagement rolled out during COVID-19. These evaluations could measure successes, challenges, improvements, and overall reach. They should be participatory and include the end users who engaged with organisations to better understand their experiences, challenges, and their suggestions. The evaluations, along with monitoring, should be undertaken regularly and be made publicly available.

## Pursuing active and intercultural engagement

How digital engagement will sustain beyond the pandemic will become evident in due course, however, there is an opportunity for organisations to consider developing hybrid engagement models that can serve useful purposes beyond the crisis period.

There is tangible evidence from the current study demonstrating that most organisations interviewed have effectively connected to many CALD communities by using varied methods (for example, informal platforms, conventional platforms, and websites). However, with the exception of one or two examples in the data, there is limited evidence on how digital platforms can be used to *build* intercultural engagement.

We recommend that organisations consider **creating a digital engagement framework**. Such a framework should include strategies focused on the digital literacy levels of CALD people, their needs, and ways to scale and adapt these strategies to accommodate for shifting levels of engagement provided through programs and services. Building intercultural engagement could be embedded into this framework if organisations pursue hybrid and two-way interaction models. For example, work in the digital civics space (Crivellaro et al., 2019; Lambton-Howard et al., 2019; Rainey et al., 2020) involves developing engaging digital platforms and applications to empower citizens. This work has demonstrated the value of creating digital templates and playbooks that government, non-government, and community organisations can use to engage with, and between, diverse communities using mainstream technologies.

To pursue active and intercultural engagement should also involve considerations of brand protection. As the results have revealed, informal platforms were used to communicate with end users rapidly. However, the informality of these platforms may lend themselves to communication breaches and security threats that could have significant consequences for organisations. We recommend that **organisations consider the importance of their brand** when adopting digital engagement frameworks. To do so, a suggested first step could be to evaluate if, and how, brands were at risk during the pandemic.

## Concluding comments

This report explored how organisations communicate and engage with CALD communities in Victoria during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The data presented highlight what information dissemination and digital engagement strategies were employed during two periods of isolation along with reflections on how effective and successful some of these have been. Accounts from participants demonstrated that the organisations partaking in this research worked effectively to continue contact with CALD groups while also attempting to maintain practices to sustain social inclusion and cohesion. Yet, several programs, services, and information campaigns did not fully engage digitally excluded CALD individuals.

Further, the failure of official public health messaging to reach some members of CALD communities raised several questions: was this failure associated with the content of the actual messages/information delivered? Was it associated with organisational outreach? Or, was the communication failure a result of broader issues beyond the remit of the organisations we interviewed? These questions need to be fully addressed to avoid a “third wave” of coronavirus infections in Victoria. We also suggest there is capacity to extend the remit of this research in a number of ways, by:

- a) building strong working relationships with digitally excluded CALD community members;
- b) working towards more active two-way digital engagement that complements face-to-face modes; and
- c) investigating how important information and messages can be tailored and targeted to CALD groups accurately and effectively.

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