Cultural And Linguistic Diversity At Work

How can governments communicate with multicultural Australians about COVID vaccines? It’s not as simple as having a poster in their language

Excerpt from The Conversation, by Holly Seale, Abela Mahimbo, Ben Harris-Roxas, Nadia Chaves, March 1, 2021


Australia launched its COVID-19 vaccination campaign last week, beginning with frontline workers in hotel quarantine, health care and aged care.

But one critical question is whether the immunisation program will meet the needs of people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

People from CALD backgrounds form a significant and growing share of Australia’s frontline workforce. This is especially true for aged, disability and community care, as well as hotel quarantine.

For example, 37% of Australian frontline care workers were born overseas according to 2016 statistics. Around 28% are from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Others may have low health literacy skills or find it challenging to track down and understand information about COVID vaccines. Lower health literacy is associated with a reluctance to accept vaccines. Recent studies also suggest those who speak a language other than English at home are less willing to get vaccinated than those who speak English only.

It’s critical we deliver a program aligned with the needs of CALD communities to ensure high levels of public confidence in the COVID vaccine rollout.

To achieve this, in February the federal government released a plan to ensure COVID vaccine rollout information and services are accessible for CALD communities.

The plan outlines the need for clear messaging that’s inclusive, tailored and translated. It also emphasises the importance of working with community leaders and multicultural community organisations.

Our new research, published today, supports the actions outlined in the plan but also highlights areas needing more focus.

We interviewed people working in multicultural and refugee agencies, as well as stakeholders in CALD community organisations, to understand barriers around communication and engagement during the pandemic.

Information gaps

Our research found gaps in information available during the pandemic. For example, there have been delays in making translations available.

Many people have sought information and news from their countries of origin to fill these
gaps. This information may be irrelevant to the Australian situation, or contradictory to local recommendations.

There’s a divide between governments and individuals, with some people feeling like they’ve been left behind. Issues such as an inability to navigate government websites or difficulties accessing support have contributed to this divide.

Translated COVID information hasn’t always been appropriate for people with low literacy or low health literacy levels. This stems from the original source materials in English not being suitable, or translations not being reviewed to make sure the information makes sense.

Newly arrived migrant communities are most in need, as many don’t have established networks to support them. Translated resources have mostly been developed for larger, established CALD groups rather than new and emerging communities. There’s been a lack of tailoring in how messages and information are communicated, and ethnic newspapers and media haven’t been effectively used.

Some people are worried they’ll lose their jobs if they refuse to get vaccinated. The challenge is they don’t have anyone to ask questions of, and are unable to access trustworthy material online.

One issue that was repeatedly raised was burnout experienced by community leaders and other stakeholders. These leaders are asked to repeatedly translate, turn “government speak into community speak”, spread messages and answer questions. They take on this role in addition to their normal responsibilities, with little to no financial support and often with an emotional burden.

The federal government’s plan recognises we need to work with community leaders, but little detail has been provided about whether support, training or resources will be available.
Feeding the world with a mix of science and tradition
Excerpt from The Conversation, by Holly Seale, Abela Mahimbo, Ben Harris-Roxas, Nadia Chaves, June 10, 2013


The biotech industry has long sought legitimacy by claiming that its genetically modified crop technologies are “feeding the world”. However this relentless focus on increasing food production ignores the fact that mass hunger exists alongside a huge food surplus.

To really reduce world hunger on a permanent basis, we need to embrace the ideas of food sovereignty, which highlights the politics of food, in terms of resource ownership, market control and decision-making power; and the concept of agroecology, which blends traditional farming knowledge with modern understandings of on-farm ecosystem services.

Last month, the World Food Prize was awarded to scientists from Monsanto, Syngenta and other bioengineering companies.

Sponsors of the prize (including Monsanto, Syngenta, Cargill, Archer Daniels Midlands, Walmart, and Pepsi) claim that it is “the foremost international award recognising individuals whose achievements have advanced human development by increasing the quantity, quality and availability of food in the world”.

The winners spoke glowingly on how biotechnology held “the promise of benefiting all mankind” by producing increased yields through improving resistance to insects and disease, and increasing the capacity to withstand climate extremes.

But well-known food movement scholar and activist Eric Holt Gimenez criticised the prize outcome saying it has “become a corporate celebration of self”.

The further development of biotechnologies has been openly endorsed by agricultural exporting countries, including Australia. The newly-released National Food Plan called for the expansion of genetically engineered crops in this country.

However, critics say that in over 20 years of commercially-planted, genetically-engineered crops, yield gains have been minimal.

In fact, the technology may be causing yields to fall by decreasing biodiversity and contributing to the evolution of superweeds. Herbicide volumes are now rising at 25% per year to cope with these superweeds.

Hunger amid abundance

Enough food is being produced to feed 12 billion people globally. But as Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Right to Food [wrote when he visited Australia last year](http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4077824.html), “people are hungry because they are marginalised economically and powerless politically”.


The real progress towards reducing hunger has not been through the mass commercialisation of genetic-engineering technologies. Instead it has come through coordinated policy initiatives across health, education, gender, and housing, in a broad and inclusive process of reform driven forward by an engaged and mobilised civil society.

Given that the majority of hungry people are smallholder farmers or landless rural workers, agroecology has been endorsed by De Schutter and others as having the capacity to “double food production in entire regions within 10 years while mitigating climate change and alleviating rural poverty”.

**Agroecology and food sovereignty**

By combining the experiences of local farmers with scientific insight, agroecology aims to mimic natural ecosystems with a focus on crop diversity and the reuse of resources. Improved soil fertility and water management are just some of the environmental and agricultural benefits that have been recently summarised on The Conversation.

What we want to draw attention to here is how agroecology is being integrated into a broader social and political movement striving for major changes in world food systems.

Agroecology aims to share knowledge and resources among farmers to increase their independence and sustainability. This is why the self-described international peasants movement, La Via Campesina, incorporates agroecology as a central pillar of its vision for food sovereignty.

Food sovereignty calls for communities to have a much greater say over their food and agricultural systems by reducing excessive corporate control of food production and distribution.

These principles have been enshrined in the constitutions and laws of several countries including Ecuador, Nepal, Mali, Bolivia, Venezuela and Brazil; and at a local level in several counties in Maine and elsewhere in the US.

La Via Campesina and its allies also have a strong presence in the new civil society mechanism of the reformed Committee on World Food Security of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, which is emerging as an alternative to the corporate-dominated G8 initiatives in global food governance.
Could native crop, kangaroo grass, become a regular ingredient in bread and help farmers regenerate land?
Excerpt from ABC News, by Sarah Lawrence, February 8, 2021

Source: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-02-08/kangaroo-grass-quest-as-the-next-super-crop/13132462

A native grass once harvested by Indigenous people, but these days more often overlooked as a roadside weed, could form the solution to restoring land exhausted by farming, researchers say.

As a teenager Dylan Male felt helpless as he watched his family struggle through the Millennium drought on their southern New South Wales farm.

“The sheep gathering around dams which had dwindled to no more than a mere puddle and all the crops withering away,” he said.

“As a kid I felt powerless to do anything, but as I grew up I soon realised I could contribute to overcoming the challenges facing our farmers.”

One of those solutions could lie with kangaroo grass, a native species found on roadsides and in paddocks, where it is eaten by livestock.

Once harvested by Indigenous groups, Mr Male said the grass was resistant to prolonged drought as well as extreme changes in temperature and rainfall.

“Over recent years there’s been growing interest in the uses of native grasses like kangaroo grass as grain crops,” he said.

“Many reasons have contributed to this spark in interest in the community, but most notably the greater recognition of Aboriginal food production systems prior to European arrival.”

Mr Male is doing his PhD at La Trobe University in Bendigo and is investigating the agronomy and ecology of Indigenous food plant species.

The project is a partnership with the Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation, which has received a $1.82 million Federal Government grant to research the viability of growing kangaroo grass.

‘A new food crop’

Dja Dja Wurrung Project Manager Latarnie McDonald is a former agronomist who has helped Mr Male sow several test paddocks in central Victoria.

“Kangaroo Grass is fascinating, as it’s perennial,” Ms McDonald said.

“We’re going out into the field and sampling tussocks of kangaroo grass that are thought to be well over 50 years old, if not older, and when you think of Australian agriculture, you’d be hard pressed to find one grass that has been alive for over 50 or 100 years.”
The project will run over the next four years and Ms McDonald said the goal is to eventually see kangaroo grass become a regular food source that is grown on a commercial scale.

“The ultimate goal is that we build actually an agronomy package,” she said.

“So we can grow kangaroo grass on existing farms and contract grow that with other farmers and then produce lots of seed grain to restore grasslands that are degraded.”

The “ultimate goal”, Ms McDonald said, was to produce “a new food crop.”

The project team hoped the product could become a regular ingredient in foods like bread, cakes and biscuits.

“I really like the taste,” Ms McDonald said.

“It’s a bit nutty — kind of tastes like a scone.

“Earlier research has found Kangaroo Grass has about 40 per cent more protein than your traditional used in bread.”

The Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans hoped that the grass could contribute to the healing of the land if it was produced on a large scale.

“Kangaroo grass forms a really dense tussock and its leaves bend outwards and protect the soil,” Ms McDonald said.

“It creates its own ecosystem.

“It helps to conserve more moisture and therefore you get a whole abundance of life that comes with that, like native insects and invertebrates.”