



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Finance**

# Media consumption and communication preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences

Qualitative research

SEPTEMBER 2014

## Disclaimer

The information in this report has been compiled by ORIMA Research, under commission from the Department of Finance (Finance), based on a qualitative evaluation of responses from individual members of the community during focus group discussions, including an indication of themes and reactions among research participants. The information expresses the views and opinions of those participants. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily represent or reflect the views or opinions of the Commonwealth of Australia (Commonwealth), or indicate its commitment to a particular course of action.

Finance recommends that users exercise their own skill and care with respect to their use of the information in this report and carefully evaluate the accuracy, currency, completeness, reliability and relevance of the information in this report for their purposes. To the extent permitted by law, the Commonwealth excludes all responsibility and liability for any loss or damage caused by the use or reliance placed on information in this report.

## Content

This work is copyright and owned by the Commonwealth of Australia.

With the exception of the Commonwealth Coat of Arms and the Department of Finance logo, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Australia licence (CC BY 3.0) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/au/deed.en>).



This work must be attributed as: *“Media consumption and communication preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences — Qualitative research, Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Finance, Communications Advice Branch”*.

## Use of the Coat of Arms

The terms under which the Coat of Arms can be used are detailed on the [following](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/coat-arms/) website: <http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/coat-arms/>.

## Contact us

Inquiries regarding the licence and any use of this work are welcome at:

Communications Advice Branch  
Department of Finance  
John Gorton Building, King Edward Terrace, Parkes ACT 2600  
Email: [governmentadvertising@finance.gov.au](mailto:governmentadvertising@finance.gov.au)

## Acknowledgements

Report compiled by ORIMA Research.

# Contents

---

<b>Contents</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
Background	6
Research methodology	6
Contextual background	6
Language proficiency and preference	6
Current perceived experiences with government communications	7
Media usage	8
Communication channel preferences	8
Engagement with government communications	9
Style preferences for maximising engagement	9
Conclusions	9
Recommendations	12
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>14</b>
1.1 Background	14
1.2 Research objectives	14
1.3 Research methodology	15
1.4 Presentation of findings	17
1.5 Quality assurance	18
<b>2. Contextual background</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 About this chapter	19
2.2 Overall findings	19
2.3 Permanency of home address	19
2.4 Income	20
2.5 Location	21
2.6 Cultural and traditional differences	21
2.7 History with governments	22
<b>3. Language proficiency and preferences</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 About this chapter	25
3.2 Proficiency in English	25
3.3 Proficiency in Indigenous languages	27
3.4 Language preference	28
<b>4. Current perceived experiences with government communications</b>	<b>30</b>
4.1 About this chapter	30
4.2 Role of government communication	30
4.3 Adequacy of government communication	31
4.4 Timeliness of receiving government communication	33
4.5 Appropriateness of language	34
4.6 Underlying expectations about government communication	35

<b>5. Media usage</b>	<b>36</b>
5.1 About this chapter	36
5.2 Overall findings	36
5.3 Mainstream (English) media	36
5.4 Indigenous media	37
<b>6. Overall communication channel preferences</b>	<b>38</b>
6.1 About this chapter	38
6.2 Overall findings	38
6.3 Primary channels	38
6.4 Secondary channels	38
<b>7. Face-to-face communication channel preferences</b>	<b>40</b>
7.1 About this chapter	40
7.2 Overall findings	40
7.3 Formal face-to-face channels	41
7.4 Informal face-to-face channels	45
<b>8. Mass media communication channel preferences</b>	<b>46</b>
8.1 About this chapter	46
8.2 Mass media	46
8.3 Television	46
8.4 Radio	49
8.5 Print media	51
<b>9. Internet communication channel preferences</b>	<b>54</b>
9.1 About this chapter	54
9.2 Overall findings	54
9.3 Government websites	55
9.4 Online advertising	56
9.5 Social networking	57
<b>10. Other communication channel preferences</b>	<b>59</b>
10.1 About this chapter	59
10.2 Overall	59
10.3 Direct contact	59
10.4 Indirect contact	63
<b>11. Engagement with government communications</b>	<b>67</b>
11.1 About this chapter	67
11.2 Differences in engagement behaviour	67
11.3 Segment 1: easy to engage—"I make it my business to know"	68
11.4 Segment 2: somewhat easy to engage —"I want to know but am constrained"	69
11.5 Segment 3: difficult to engage—"I don't want to know"	71
<b>12. Style preferences for maximising engagement with government communication</b>	<b>72</b>
12.1 About this chapter	72
12.2 Overall communication style preference	72
12.3 Design	72
12.4 Talent	74
12.5 Amount of text and general layout and format	76
12.6 Government branding	77
12.7 Music	77
12.8 Tone	78

<b>13. Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>79</b>
13.1 Conclusions	79
13.2 Recommendations	81
<b>Appendix A: Demographic profile of research participants</b>	<b>83</b>
Age	83
Gender	83
Marital status	83
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin	83
Children under 16 living at home	84
English as the main language spoken at home	84
Highest level of education completed	84
Centrelink payments received (multiple response possible)	84
Work status (multiple response possible)	85
Annual total household income	85

# Executive summary

---

## Background

The Communications Advice Branch (CAB), within the Department of Finance commissioned ORIMA Research to conduct quantitative and qualitative research to inform the development of media and communication strategies that effectively and efficiently target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences.

This report presents the findings from the qualitative research.

## Research methodology

A total of 187 people participated in the qualitative research which was conducted between 21 November 2012 and 19 March 2013.

The research was conducted in 10 different locations:

- metropolitan: Sydney (NSW), Parramatta (NSW) and Perth (WA)
- regional: Cairns (Qld) and Ballarat (Vic)
- remote: Alice Springs (NT), Jabiru (NT) and Roebourne (WA)
- very remote: Ceduna (SA) and Thursday Island (Qld).

## Contextual background

Overall, the research found that a number of background, environmental and historical factors contributed to research participants' access, experiences, needs and preferences in relation to government information<sup>1</sup>. These factors included:

- permanency of home address
- income
- location
- cultural and traditional differences
- history with governments.

## Language proficiency and preference

The research identified three broad levels of English language proficiency among research participants:

- 'Fully-functional' English—participants understood both written and spoken English with ease. This level of English was found to be the level currently used in most government communications (i.e. letters, correspondences, information materials, campaigns and oral communications).
- 'Everyday' English—this level of English was at a basic/colloquial level and adequate for day-to-day interactions/living. Participants with this level of

---

<sup>1</sup> The focus of the research was on providing an evidence-base for integrated communications campaigns, developed and implemented by Australian government department/agencies.

proficiency tended to have limited vocabulary and grammar. They could understand both spoken and written English to some degree, but had trouble understanding more complex words and phrases.

- ‘Broken’ English—this level of English was the most limited. Participants with this level of proficiency understood key words in English and commonly used a combination of words in English and a local dialect. While they could understand basic spoken English, they had difficulty understanding written English. Their vocabulary and use of grammar was limited.

The research found that participants in metropolitan and regional locations appeared to generally have a higher level of English proficiency than those in remote or very remote locations.

The level of English proficiency among participants was found to strongly impact on their ability to understand and engage with materials and communications from government. Participants who had limited speaking or reading skills in English were less engaged with and responsive to the information they received from government than their counterparts who had better language proficiency. They were also less equipped and confident in seeking information for themselves.

It was evident from the research that most participants in remote and very remote locations of the research were multi-lingual. Most spoke English in addition to their Indigenous language(s). In contrast, most participants in metropolitan and regional locations indicated that their main or only language was English.

Almost all participants indicated that their Indigenous language was an oral language and hence, the language(s) was not familiar to them in written form.

Given the strong cultural significance of language, the research found a preference for oral information to be presented in English and Indigenous languages. However, most participants had a preference for written information to be presented to them in English.

## **Current perceived experiences with government communications**

The research found that almost all participants acknowledged that government communications played an important and necessary role, particularly for Indigenous audiences. The research found that participants had difficulty distinguishing between the different levels of government information (i.e. local council, state/territory and federal). However, the research endeavoured to focus discussions on Federal Government information through the use of examples.

Across all the different research locations, it was evident that:

- Participants perceived that they did not have adequate information about government programs, services and initiatives.
- There were significant gaps as well as myths and misinformation about government services, programs and initiatives.
- The type of channels used for government communication influenced perceptions of timeliness, with direct channels (e.g. visiting, phone calls and mass media) perceived to be timelier than indirect channels (e.g. letters and word-of-mouth).

There was a strong expectation among research participants that government agencies had a responsibility to communicate with them about changes and availability of services and programs (i.e. “entitlements”).

The research indicated that most Indigenous audiences were likely to wait to receive government information rather than to seek it out.

Key motivators to seek out government information included:

- having prior knowledge that something was changing, occurring and/or available (e.g. via word-of-mouth, media or advertising)
- feeling comfortable to ask and search for information
- a belief that information sought would be personally (e.g. avoid penalties) and socially beneficial (e.g. helping others in the community)
- a desire to be informed and knowledgeable.

Key factors enabling the receipt of government information included:

- being able to physically access the information
- being able to easily understand and engage with the information received.

Key barriers to accessing and engaging with government information included:

- language and literacy skills
- income
- health issues
- locational factors
- lack of knowledge, i.e. not knowing what to look for (“I don’t know what I don’t know”)
- lack of a permanent home/residence
- cultural and traditional differences
- negative history with governments.

## **Media usage**

The research found that:

- Mainstream media (especially television and radio) was accessed by participants who had differing levels of English proficiency. In contrast, only participants who had better English literacy skills and proficiency tended to engage with mainstream print media.
- Indigenous media was used to access information in English as well as in Indigenous languages. Indigenous media was used primarily because it was perceived to be relevant, easy to understand and meaningful.

## **Communication channel preferences**

The research found that most participants preferred and wanted multiple channels of government communication.

Overall, the research found that most participants felt that for government communications, face-to-face (including community events), television and letters were channels that were highly effective in reaching and engaging them. Furthermore, all of these channels were commonly perceived as being important primary channels for government information.

Other channels of communication were found to be effective as secondary communication channels which supplemented/provided more detail and/or reinforced the primary channels of communication. These secondary channels included:



- radio
- print media (newspapers and magazines)
- leaflets/pamphlets
- posters
- government websites
- online advertising
- email
- telephone (hotlines and SMS)
- DVDs/videos.

## **Engagement with government communications**

The research identified three behavioural segments in relation to engagement with government communications:

- Segment 1: easy to engage: “I make it my business to know”
- Segment 2: somewhat easy to engage: “I want to know but am constrained”
- Segment 3: difficult to engage: “I don’t want to know”.

The research found that a combination of attitudinal, demographic and environmental factors appeared to contribute towards steering people into one of these three segments.

The nature of qualitative research means that it is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the sizes of the above segments. However, for indicative purposes, in terms of relative sizes:

- Segment 2 appeared to be the largest (comprising most participants)
- Segment 1 appeared to be the second largest (with some participants)
- Segment 3 appeared to be the smallest (with only a few participants).

## **Style preferences for maximising engagement**

The research found that a range of stylistic elements played a role in facilitating cut-through and promoting affinity with government communications among participants. This included the following elements:

- design (e.g. bright and/or Indigenous colours and use of imagery)
- talent (e.g. representative)
- the amount of text and general layout and format (e.g. limited text, white space, headings and sub-headings, dot points and easy to read font style and size)
- Government branding (e.g. clearly visible)
- music (e.g. Indigenous music/artists for targeted campaigns)
- tone (e.g. matter of fact, serious, positive/encouraging, friendly/helpful and/or non-patronising).

## **Conclusions**

The research indicates that adopting strategies that differentiate between the following elements would maximise the effectiveness of government communications:

- primary and secondary sources of information

- mainstream and Indigenous media channels for general information and Indigenous specific information
- levels of English proficiency (i.e. 'everyday' or 'broken' English) for oral and written communications.

The research suggests that the following strategies would maximise the effectiveness of communications with people likely to be **easy to engage (Segment 1: "I make it my business to know")**:

- having direct communication by government agencies via direct mail and all mass media channels
- facilitating information seeking via websites, visiting and calling government agencies as well as picking up leaflets/pamphlets
- using mainstream media for general information and Indigenous media for information specific to Indigenous Australians
- ensuring oral and written communications are in 'everyday' English.

For those people who are only **somewhat easy to engage (Segment 2: "I want to know but am constrained")**, the research suggests that the following strategies would maximise the effectiveness of communications:

- using government agencies as the primary source of information, supplemented by intermediaries as the secondary source of information
  - providing information via direct mail, posters, leaflets/pamphlets and mass media channels of TV and radio
  - facilitating information seeking via face-to-face (e.g. visiting offices, attending information sessions, and community events) and oral (i.e. telephone with interpreter access) channels
- using mainstream media (TV and radio) and Indigenous media (TV, radio and print) for general information, and Indigenous media for information specific to Indigenous Australians
  - incorporating Indigenous design, talent and music for government communications via Indigenous media channels to maximise affinity, cut-through, perceived importance and relevance
- ensuring oral communications are in 'everyday' English and Indigenous languages
- ensuring written communications are in 'everyday' and 'broken' English.

The key differences in approach for people who are only somewhat easy to engage (Segment 2) compared to those who are easy to engage (Segment 1) are as follows:

- including intermediaries as a secondary source for information, in addition to the primary source being government agencies
- expanding the range of communication channels to include posters in addition to leaflets/pamphlets and direct mail
- focussing on mass media channels of TV and radio rather than on all mass media channels
- expanding the range of face-to-face information seeking channels to include information sessions and community events, in addition to visiting offices
- facilitating telephone interpreter access for oral information seeking channels
- having a greater focus on Indigenous design, talent and music for government communications via Indigenous media channels
- including Indigenous languages as a form of oral communication, in addition to making such communications available in 'everyday' English
- ensuring written communications are available in 'broken' English, in addition to 'everyday' English.

The research identified the following strategies for maximising the effectiveness of communications with people who are **difficult to engage (Segment 3: "I don't want to know")**:

- using intermediaries as the primary source of information and government agencies as the secondary source of information
  - providing information via direct mail, posters, leaflets/pamphlets and mass media
  - facilitating information seeking via face-to-face (e.g. visiting offices) and oral (i.e. telephone with interpreter access) channels
- using Indigenous media (TV, radio and print) for general information and Indigenous specific information
  - incorporating Indigenous design, talent and music for government communications via Indigenous media channels to maximise affinity, cut-through, perceived importance and relevance
- ensuring oral communications are in 'everyday' English and Indigenous languages
- ensuring written communications are in 'everyday' and 'broken' English.

Having an appreciation of the different segments and their communication preferences enables government agencies to better target and tailor communications to maximise engagement with Indigenous audiences.

## Recommendations

It was clear from this research and other government communications research undertaken by ORIMA Research that there are many factors to consider when developing communication strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The research identified a number of principles to provide general guidance for government communications in a broad sense, but subject matter and issue specific research as well as expert advice are critical components to developing effective communications strategies.

Based on the research findings, the following general guiding principles should be considered in government communications with Indigenous audiences:

### Principle 1:

**Use an 'everyday' level of English.** This level of English is a basic/colloquial level and adequate for day-to-day interactions/living. People with this level of proficiency have limited English vocabulary and grammar. They can understand both spoken and written English to some degree, but have trouble understanding more complex words and phrases.

### Principle 2:

**Use multiple channels of communication.** This is important to deliver reach as well as to reinforce information delivery and understanding. It will also ensure that people who do not have a permanent home address are more likely to be exposed to the information.

### Principle 3:

**Choose strategies based on information preferences and demographic profile.** Online and technology-based channels (e.g. SMS) are likely to have lower usage among middle-aged to older participants and those living in remote and very remote locations. Face-to-face and other channels (e.g. visiting or calling government offices) that require considerable individual effort are unlikely to be used by younger people and those living in metropolitan and regional areas.

### Principle 4:

**Use mainstream as well as Indigenous media.** This will ensure reach of government communications across all segments as well as cater for different language and literacy skills and those in different locations.

### Principle 5:

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share similar media consumption and channel preferences.** Cultural background in itself does not seem to influence media consumption or channel preferences among Indigenous audiences.

### Principle 6:

**Use culturally specific elements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Indigenous specific campaigns.** Incorporating suitable Indigenous

design, talent and music for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is important to maximise their engagement and affinity with government communications targeted specifically at Indigenous audiences.

### **Principle 7:**

**Be an active provider of information.** Government agencies should provide information proactively and not assume that the target audience will seek out information on their own, without being notified to do so. There is a strong underlying expectation among most Indigenous people that government agencies have a responsibility to communicate about changes and availability of services and programs (i.e. “entitlements”).

# 1. Introduction

---

## 1.1 Background

While there is considerable media consumption research available for mainstream (English language) audiences, there is a paucity of research about media usage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. There is also limited research available into how Indigenous Australians search for government information, services and programs, as well as their preferences for receiving information from government.

Australian Government agencies have both a procedural<sup>2</sup> imperative and duty of care to ensure that government communications are accessible to all relevant/affected members of the public.

The Communications Advice Branch (CAB), within the Department of Finance, commissioned ORIMA Research to address these information gaps and conduct quantitative and qualitative research to inform the development of media and communication strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences.

Qualitative research was conducted to build on the findings of quantitative research and to:

- explore issues not well suited to a structured survey instrument
- explore in more detail significant issues and findings that arose from the quantitative research.

This report presents the findings from the qualitative research.

## 1.2 Research objectives

The overarching objective of the research was to build the evidence base used to inform communication strategies for Australian Government campaigns, programs and initiatives that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The specific objectives of the qualitative research phase were to:

- determine English language proficiency/literacy
- determine Indigenous language proficiency
- provide a picture of media usage amongst Indigenous Australians, including:
  - Indigenous and in-language media/channel consumption
  - mainstream (English) media/channel consumption
  - social media use
  - computer and internet use for obtaining information

---

<sup>2</sup> Guidelines on Information and Advertising Campaigns by Australian Government Departments and Agencies.

- mobile phone use (in terms of how these devices are used, including access to media content/news)
- provide a picture of information seeking (non-media) behaviour among Indigenous Australians including:
  - preferred format for information
  - preferred language for receiving communications
  - preferred distribution points for government communication material
  - the use of intermediaries (e.g. peers, community members and leaders).

### **1.3 Research methodology**

A total of 187 people participated in the qualitative research which was conducted between 21 November 2012 and 19 March 2013.

The methodology for this research was qualitative in nature and included a combination of full focus groups (n=7-12 participants), mini focus groups (n=3-6 participants) and in-depth interviews.

The research was conducted in 10 locations:

- metropolitan—Sydney (NSW), Parramatta (NSW) and Perth (WA)
- regional—Cairns (Qld) and Ballarat (Vic)
- remote—Alice Springs (NT), Jabiru (NT) and Roebourne (WA)
- very remote—Ceduna (SA) and Thursday Island (Qld).

Figure 1 shows the research design with the number of participants across the 10 locations.

**Figure 1: Qualitative research locations**



Research participants were recruited using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and local recruiters in communities. Participants received a reimbursement payment of \$80 to cover their expenses to attend the one-and-a-half hour session.

The research design also included participants with a range of demographic characteristics and community roles, including:

- income support recipients and non-income support recipients
- people who spoke English as their preferred language at home and those who spoke a language other than English as their preferred language at home
- Elders<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> Elders were specifically recruited for two mini groups. However, additional Elders participated in other groups.



Table 1 shows the number of people who participated in the research across key demographic characteristics. The full demographic profile of research participants is provided at Appendix A.

**Table 1: Key demographic characteristics of qualitative research participants**

Demographics characteristic of participants <sup>4</sup>		Percentage
Age	18-30 years	30%
	31-50 years	46%
	Over 50 years	24%
Gender	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Income support	Income Support <sup>5</sup> recipient	68%
	Non-recipient of Income Support	32%
Main language spoken at home	English	59%
	Indigenous language(s)	41%
Location	Metropolitan	19%
	Regional	31%
	Remote	26%
	Very remote	24%

## 1.4 Presentation of findings

The research was qualitative in nature and the results and findings are presented accordingly. This research approach does not allow for the exact number of participants holding a particular view on individual issues to be measured. This report provides an indication of themes and reactions among research participants rather than exact proportions of participants who felt a certain way.

The following terms used in the report provide an indication and approximation of size of the target audience who held particular views:

- Most—refers to findings that relate to more than three quarters of the research participants.
- Many—refers to findings that relate to more than half of the research participants.
- Some—refers to findings that relate to about a third of the research participants.
- A few—refers to findings that relate to less than a quarter of research participants.

The most common findings are reported, except in certain situations where a minority has raised particular issues, which are considered to be important and may have potentially wide-ranging implications/applications.

<sup>4</sup> Not all research participants completed a demographic questionnaire. Figures refer to only those who completed the questionnaire.

<sup>5</sup> Income Support payments included Austudy, ABSTUDY, Youth Allowance, Newstart, Parenting Payment, Disability Support Payment, Carer Payment and Age Pension.

Quotes have been provided throughout the report to support the main results or findings under discussion.

We acknowledge and understand that *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* is the preferred term when referring to Indigenous Australians. However, in this report we have opted to use the term *Indigenous Australians* when referring to all research participants. This allows the report to more accurately differentiate findings that applied to all research participants from those that applied only to Aboriginal participants or only to Torres Strait Islander participants. This differentiation was important given the research identified some instances where these two groups held different views and preferences.

Specific findings for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants have only been identified and discussed if there was a significant difference in results with the research participants overall.

## **1.5 Quality assurance**

The project was conducted in accordance with international quality standard ISO 20252.

## 2. Contextual background

---

### 2.1 About this chapter

This chapter presents background and contextual information for the research findings described in the later chapters of the report, to assist understanding the differences in and reasons for findings among research participants.

### 2.2 Overall findings

Overall, the research found that there were a number of background, environmental and historical factors that contributed to research participants' access, experiences, needs and preferences in relation to government information<sup>6</sup>. These factors included:

- permanency of home address—participants' living arrangements, specifically whether they had a permanent and consistent home address or were regularly transient
- income—participants' financial circumstance/earnings
- location—whether participants lived in metropolitan, regional, remote or very remote parts of Australia
- cultural and traditional differences—variations between and within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations
- history with governments—past and present experiences with governments.

### 2.3 Permanency of home address

The research found that the permanency of home address had an impact on the dissemination and timely receipt of government information, especially via direct mail (i.e. addressed letters).

The research indicated that participants had two common forms of residency patterns regardless of location:

- those who resided in one consistent place during the year, and rarely changed address

*"We have one permanent address."—Sydney*

- those who had multiple residences over the year, spending varying amounts of time in different places, primarily for the following reasons:

- visiting or holidaying with family and friends

*"For the last two years I moved up and down from Adelaide."—Ceduna*

---

<sup>6</sup> The focus of the research was on providing an evidence-base for integrated communications campaigns, developed and implemented by Australian Government department/agencies.

*"I travel with my girlfriend."—Roebourne*

- caring for or "helping out" family

*"My people come from Dubbo but I go between Dubbo and Sydney all year. My kids and grandkids live here."—Sydney*

- "going home" to communities where they and/or their families come from
- attending cultural ceremonies
- seeking or undertaking work and/or study

*"My home is Victoria but I'm up here doing a course to work on the rigs."—Roebourne*

- receiving medical treatment.

Among participants who were transient throughout the year, some indicated that they regularly updated their address when they moved, but others did not. This pattern was evident among participants across metropolitan, regional, remote and very remote areas.

For those who did not update their address details with government agencies, their mail tended to be either held at their latest recorded address until their return, or forwarded on to them by family, friends or community members. These participants were therefore less likely to receive their mail in a timely manner.

*"I hold all my brothers' mail, and my sisters'."—Sydney*

## **2.4 Income**

The research found that participants' income appeared to impact on their access to government information, especially via electronic, print media and face-to-face channels.

*"It's how much money people have that I think contributes...If you're struggling to put a meal on the table, you have to work out your priorities."—Cairns*

Participants with lower incomes commonly reported finding it more difficult to access government information due to the cost associated with some channels. Specifically, this was due to:

- the cost of purchasing technological equipment (e.g. a smartphone or computer) as well as services (e.g. mobile phone/internet plan for downloads) to access government information that was primarily accessible via the internet

*"Some will go on it [internet] but it will cost a lot of money."—Alice Springs*

- the cost of buying or subscribing to newspapers and magazines
- difficulty in acquiring transport to attend face-to-face appointments, meetings and/or information sessions.

*"Most our mob don't have their own vehicle."—Alice Springs*

Generally, the research indicated that due to financial circumstance these participants placed a lower priority on accessing information that involved cost, than on meeting their essential living needs (e.g. food, bills, rent and petrol).

*"A lot of people in communities have bigger priorities in life."—Cairns*

## 2.5 Location

The research found that where participants lived tended to influence their access to timely and reliable government information.

Participants living in remote and very remote locations more commonly reported experiencing difficulties in accessing information than their regional and metro counterparts.

*"I feel we're left behind here because we're a remote area."—Thursday Island*

This was primarily due to:

- limited or "patchy" signal coverage for mobile phones, the internet and/or television (some very remote communities were reported to have limited or no signal for mobile, internet and/or television)

*"People that live out in Koonibba... have trouble getting internet and mobile signal."—Ceduna*

- lack of retail outlets and/or competition to access and/or purchase new equipment and technology at reasonable prices
- lack of access to print media (e.g. newspapers) as a result of the time taken to transport these materials into the community

*"We don't get any newspapers out here anymore."—Jabiru*

- infrequent or interrupted mail delivery due to weather or transportation (e.g. once a week or less).

*"When the wet sets in it's very hard...they've got to fly in."—Jabiru*

*"I get my mail only once every two weeks."—Jabiru*

## 2.6 Cultural and traditional differences

The research found that there were differences in the cultural background of participants across the different research locations and groups. These differences tended to influence preferences for executional elements of communication materials (e.g. the talent, music and designs used). However, cultural background itself did not seem to influence media consumption or communication channel preferences.

The research identified key differences between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants that were generally felt to be inadequately recognised and catered for in government communications.

*"We're as diverse as anyone. We're not just one group of people."—Cairns*

Many participants believed that these two cultural groups were often considered to be "the same". While a "broad brush" approach was felt to be appropriate in some government communication campaigns and materials targeted at the general public, many felt that more tailored approaches were necessary for materials specifically targeting the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

Some participants felt that government agencies tended to adopt a generalised approach in dealing with Indigenous people, based on an assumption of homogeneity:

- between Indigenous people—i.e. assuming that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were the same
- within each Indigenous group—i.e. tribes or groups within Aboriginal as well as Torres Strait Islander communities were the same.

*“It saddens me that they think of us as the same, they lump all Aboriginals in together.”—Thursday Island*

Such an approach was perceived to “lack respect” and show a “misunderstanding” of the separate heritage and traditions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In particular, Torres Strait Islander participants stated that their culture, languages, and the “unique problems” they faced were very different to the Aboriginal population. As such they felt that it was important they be considered separately by government agencies for certain types of targeted Indigenous communications.

*“The Islanders themselves will not speak for us and we can’t speak for them...we have different experiences every day.”—Thursday Island*

In addition to these two different cultural groups, participants indicated that their languages and customs also varied significantly among their own people (i.e. tribes) in different locations. In the Torres Strait, Thursday Island and other “inner islands” were considered to be more “multicultural” and “mainstream” than the “outer islands”. It was also felt that Torres Strait Islanders who had moved to mainland Australia were different in their outlook, and cultural practices, and therefore, their information preferences and needs.

*“We don’t know the issues from that mob.”—Jabiru*

Likewise, Aboriginal participants also reported that Aboriginal people across Australia had significantly different languages, reference points, cultural practices and customs.

*“Up North they call us yellow fellas. There is a big difference.”—Perth*

## **2.7 History with governments**

The research found that past experiences negatively influenced some middle-aged and older participants’ perceptions of, and engagement with, government agencies.

*“People here sometimes still hold that grudge.”—Thursday Island*

Many participants indicated that they, or members of their family had negative past experiences with governments. This included participants who:

- were part of the Stolen Generation, and were “forcibly removed from [their] families”

*“I was taken away from my parents and put in a mission and then foster care.”—Perth*

- had been placed under the care of a “protector”, from whom they had to seek permission for many aspects of their lives

*“I’m one of them that was under a protector. You couldn’t do anything unless you asked them.”—Thursday Island*

- had fought in wars/served in the defence forces for Australia and had not been recognised or rewarded to the same extent as non-Indigenous Australians
- had lived during the time when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had been restricted from voting and were treated as “second class citizens”.

More recent experiences also negatively impacted on the perceptions and engagement of some participants. This included the experience of:

- a perceived lack of respect for and recognition of Indigenous culture and heritage in government service delivery as evidenced by
  - the “insufficient training” of government staff in culturally appropriate behaviours or manners. Many of these participants felt that they were often treated with limited respect by government staff, who “talked down to”, were “rude” or “unhelpful” to Indigenous clients
  - the lack of access to interpreters and information in Indigenous languages (as provided to non-English speaking communities)

*“You go to Centrelink and they’ve got all the other languages there [on the welcome sign] except Aboriginal.”—Ceduna*

- the formal décor/setting of many government offices (e.g. lacking in artworks and flags) in Indigenous populated areas
- a perception that “goal posts” in relation to making claims (e.g. for Stolen Generation compensation and for Land Rights) were constantly changing

*“They put all these policies in place to apply for compensation but then they put these hurdles in the way.”—Perth*

- the lack of official recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the Constitution

*“We’re waiting for them to put us in the Constitution.”—Ceduna*

- a lack of consultation in relation to changes of policy that had a direct impact on the local community (e.g. changes in laws relating to turtle and dugong hunting, changes to fishery boundaries and income management)

*“They change policies without consulting the Traditional Owners. Then three months down the track we hear.”—Thursday Island*

- a perceived inequity in law enforcement—participants felt that racial profiling was common, and excessive enforcement was used against Indigenous people compared with their non-Indigenous counterparts

*“Police paint us all with the same brush.”—Roebourne*

- a perceived inequity in government recruitment processes—some participants cited examples where local Indigenous specific positions as well as generalist positions were given to non-Indigenous applicants due to prejudices perceived to be associated with their “skin colour and culture”.

Participants identified a greater need for cultural awareness training for government agency staff who worked either directly or indirectly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was felt that this would assist in overcoming

entrenched negative perceptions, and increase respect for their culture and heritage. Participants stressed the importance of this cultural training to be conducted on a local basis due to the unique cultural norms in each area.

*“They’ve got to have cultural awareness training.”—Ceduna*



## 3. Language proficiency and preferences

---

### 3.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses the proficiency of both English and Indigenous languages among research participants. It also presents the research findings in relation to participants' language preferences for government communications.

### 3.2 Proficiency in English

The research found that English proficiency varied across research participants, particularly by location. Participants in metropolitan and regional locations appeared to generally have a higher level of English proficiency than those in remote or very remote locations.

The level of English proficiency among participants was found to strongly impact on their ability to understand and engage with materials and communications from government. Participants who had limited speaking or reading skills in English were less engaged with and responsive to the information they received from government than their counterparts who had better English proficiency. They were also less equipped and confident in seeking information for themselves.

Most participants perceived that all government communications were available solely in English, while only a few had seen or heard communication materials in-language (e.g. Creole), especially on Indigenous radio and in poster format.

*"They are starting to use some Creole, very slowly."—Cairns*

The research found that there were three key factors that influenced levels of English proficiency:

- Access to schooling—participants who had received formal education tended to have better proficiency in spoken and written English.

*"My gran never went to school, she can't read or write but she can say a few words."—Roebourne*

- Level of education reached—participants who had completed year 10 and above appeared to be more comfortable conversing and reading in English.

*"I think it's very important that somebody sits there and helps us understand... a lot of us only reached year 5."—Perth*

- Number of other languages spoken—in some locations, particularly regional, remote and very remote, participants had learnt English as a second, third or even fourth language. These participants generally did not learn English until later in life or only when attending school, and were more proficient in their Indigenous language(s) than in English.

*“There are two languages here in Torres Strait. English is the third language.”—Thursday Island*

*“English is not people’s first language here. They have their mother’s language, father’s language and sometimes the local language, then only English.”—Jabiru*

The research identified three levels of English spoken by participants, at varying levels of proficiency:

- ‘Fully-functional’ English—participants who were comfortable with using this level of English tended to be better-educated, have learnt English formally and/or speak it at home. They understood both written and spoken English with ease. This level of English was found to be the level currently used in most government communications (i.e. letters, correspondences, information materials, campaigns and oral communications).

*“Because I worked in the public service area for years I can read and write but if I didn’t work there I wouldn’t know it.”—Perth*

- ‘Everyday’ English—this level of English was at a basic/colloquial level and adequate for day-to-day interactions/living. Participants with this level of proficiency tended to have limited vocabulary and grammar and generally indicated that they spoke enough English to “get by”. They could understand both spoken and written English to some degree, but had difficulty understanding more complex words and phrases.

*“The grammar and some of the words are hard to understand but the newsletter from school, I can understand fine.”—Cairns*

- ‘Broken’ English—this level of English was the most limited. Participants with this level of proficiency understood key words in English and commonly used a combination of words in English and a local dialect (i.e. “Pidgin English” or “Creole”). Most of these participants spoke English as a second, third or fourth language. While they could understand basic spoken English, they had difficulty understanding written English. Their vocabulary and use of grammar was limited.

*“It’s only a couple of decades ago we started to have a grasp of the English language and the older Islanders are still speaking dialects.”—Thursday Island*

### 3.3 Proficiency in Indigenous languages

It was evident from the research that most participants in remote and very remote research locations were multi-lingual. Most spoke English alongside their Indigenous language(s). Some spoke up to four Indigenous languages. The number of languages spoken appeared to be a reflection of the inherited languages that family members spoke as well as an adoption of local languages through travelling and/or living in different areas of Australia.

*"I speak two Aboriginal languages and English."—Roeibourne*

In contrast, most participants in metropolitan and regional locations indicated that their main or only language was English. These participants commonly reported that the use of their Indigenous language(s) had eroded over time.

*"English would be our first language."—Sydney*

Almost all participants indicated that their Indigenous language was an oral language. Therefore, Indigenous language(s) were not familiar to them in written form. Some participants believed that the written form of Indigenous languages was a "modern" development aimed at preserving and "keeping the language alive".

*"Our language, it's oral...nothing written."—Jabiru*

The research found that Indigenous language(s) was strongly entwined with participants' cultural identity and heritage, especially in non-metropolitan locations. Many participants felt that it was important for their language(s) to be used and maintained. Many (including middle-aged to older participants in metropolitan and regional locations) felt that governments should play a role in facilitating this process and helping preserve Indigenous languages, thereby maintaining Indigenous culture.

*"It's [language] part of us."—Ceduna*

*"They [the government] need to help us keep and speak our language or it will wash away."—Thursday Island*

This sentiment was particularly strong among participants who had previously experienced constraints against using their Indigenous language(s) and who had seen such languages diminish. Examples of language restrictions cited in the research included:

- participants in the Torres Strait who had been placed under a "protector" and "not allowed to speak" or use their language

*"It was only a couple of decades ago we weren't able to practice our culture and language."—Thursday Island*

- participants who had been taken from their families (e.g. placed on missions or in foster care) where they were required to only converse and write in English

*"We weren't allowed to speak our language."—Parramatta*

- participants who had been restricted from using their language, even conversationally, while in mainstream schooling.

### 3.4 Language preference

Given the strong cultural significance of language (as discussed above), the research found a preference for **oral** information to be presented in English as well as in Indigenous languages (particularly for those in regional, remote and very remote locations). However, most participants held a preference for **written** government information to be presented in English. This was because their Indigenous languages “did not exist” in, or were not felt to be easily transferrable into, the written form.

*“Noongar people, the culture is more hands on... we never really read any stuff.”—Perth*

However, participants in all locations stressed the importance of simplifying written English so it could be better understood by:

- reducing “government jargon” (i.e. “big and complex words” and technical terms)

*“Put them in a language you can understand... not so white, not so formal. Break it down.”—Cairns*

- keeping sentences short and to-the-point
- using pictures where possible to demonstrate or reinforce meaning.

*“They write it in government language. Some of it you have to have a law degree to understand.”—Ballarat*

The research identified three broad groups among research participants in relation to their language preference:

- participants who were comfortable communicating in English, but were not comfortable communicating in their Indigenous language(s)

*“I just talk English.”—Alice Springs*

*“In my house we have never spoken Aboriginal.”—Parramatta*

- participants who were comfortable communicating in English as well as in their Indigenous language(s)

*“At Dad’s house I speak Creole, at Mum’s English, at my friend’s some Murri.”—Cairns*

- participants who were not comfortable communicating in English, either due to low literacy or a preference for communicating in their Indigenous language(s).

*“The old people don’t speak a lot of English. They need an interpreter.”—Jabiru*

Participants who were more comfortable communicating in English than in Indigenous language(s) tended to:

- have learnt English at home or at school
- be comfortable dealing in English in written as well as oral form
- assist others in the community with understanding information in English when required.

*"Family members come [for help]. Especially if they see that [government] label on it."—Cairns*

Participants who were comfortable communicating in English as well as in their Indigenous language(s) tended to:

- have learnt English at home or at school
- prefer written information in English, and oral information either in English or in their Indigenous language

*"We learnt [English] in school and when our parents want to talk to us they use the native language and the Creole."—Thursday Island*

- have difficulty understanding some written information in English
- help others and/or receive help from others in the community to understand information in English.

Participants who were more comfortable communicating in Indigenous language(s) than in English tended to:

- have low literacy levels and/or speak English as a second, third or fourth language

*"A lot of times in remote places people will come up and go 'here, read this letter.'"—Cairns*

- have difficulty understanding written information in English

*"Some of them can't read in English."—Alice Springs*

- have a clear preference for oral communication in Indigenous language(s)
- be from regional, remote and very remote locations.

## 4. Current perceived experiences with government communications

---

### 4.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses research participants' current experiences with government communications.

The chapter presents research findings about the role, adequacy and timeliness of government communications as well as appropriateness of language used.

It also identifies participants' expectations about government information.

### 4.2 Role of government communication

The research found that almost all participants acknowledged that government communications played an important and necessary role, particularly for Indigenous audiences.

The research found that participants had difficulty distinguishing between the different levels of government information (i.e. local council, state/territory and Federal). However, the research endeavoured to focus discussions on Federal Government information through the use of examples.

The purpose of government communications was mainly perceived to be to:

- inform participants about changes that could affect them (e.g. digital switchover and fisheries licensing changes)

*"I feel if there have been changes in policies and it's going to affect you, you should be notified."*—Thursday Island

- make participants aware of programs, services and initiatives that were available (e.g. Closing the Gap and Diabetes Awareness)
- encourage certain behaviours/practices (e.g. healthy eating, anti-smoking, road safety and prevention of domestic violence).

All research participants agreed that government needed to be involved in communicating with Indigenous communities, primarily because it had a duty of care to its citizens. This duty of care was felt to be more acute for Indigenous communities because of the greater level of vulnerability and disadvantage among the Indigenous population compared to the non-Indigenous population in Australia.

*"If they don't tell us, how are we to know? We don't know what to ask, who to go to? Government is there to take care of people, right?"*—Sydney

Such vulnerability and disadvantage contributed to barriers to information access among Indigenous Australians as a result of:

- educational issues—e.g. lower literacy and numeracy skills and reduced English language capacity

*“Some people are a bit ashamed because they can’t read and write.”—Roebourne*

- health issues—e.g. mobility problems, poor eye-sight (generally as a result of macular degeneration due to diabetes) and hearing loss

*“I can read but only with my left eye now.”—Jabiru*

- affordability issues—e.g. limited access to technology (e.g. computers) and phone/internet plans, and lack of transport to visit government offices
- locational issues—e.g. greater distance and cost to travel for access to face-to-face government support especially for those living in remote and very remote locations.

*“They’ve got a Centrelink in Karratha but it depends if you have transport to get to the office.”—Roebourne*

### **4.3 Adequacy of government communication**

The research found that across all the different research locations, participants consistently felt that they did not have adequate information about government programs, services and initiatives.

It was evident throughout the research that there were significant information gaps as well as myths and misperceptions about government services, programs and initiatives. Furthermore, many participants felt that access to information was also hampered due to some local offices not having adequate and up-to-date subject matter knowledge when enquiries were made.

*“I don’t know what that means [‘Closing the Gap’]... it would be nice to know more.”—Alice Springs*

*“I’ve had some stuff ups with Centrelink...a lot of them are untrained and you get the wrong information.”—Ballarat*

Many indicated that they found out about eligible services and programs “accidentally” from word-of-mouth via the community rather than directly from government agencies. It was also evident that most participants expected and relied on government agencies to provide them with information rather than seeking information themselves from such agencies.

*“I don’t think we get enough information about Centrelink payments that we’re entitled to. I only find out when people tell me.”—Perth*

Overall, the research found that most participants’ knowledge of which agencies to go to for assistance was restricted to the following:

- Centrelink—for family assistance, income and educational financial support
- employment providers via Centrelink—for employment training and services
- Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) —for “free” health services
- Australian Taxation Office—for taxation matters.

*“I know about the ATO.”—Jabiru*

Participants who were receiving government benefits were more likely than those who were not receiving government benefits to report receiving information and having contact with relevant government agencies.

*"I don't think Centrelink tells students what they're entitled to and so they end up dropping out because of financial hardship."—Ballarat*

Such contact was evident in relation to income support matters from the Department of Human Services (Centrelink and/or Family Assistance Office) as well as from employment service providers. However, many participants still felt that they were not actively or fully made aware of their "entitlements" by these agencies.

Participants who had local access to Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) were more likely to report having access to health related information via posters, leaflets and pamphlets/brochures at the AMS.

*"Usually the medical co-op has pretty updated things."—Ballarat*

The research found that most participants felt that they did not have much direct contact or information about taxation matters. Only some participants reported that they received taxation information from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) (e.g. 'TaxPack' and notification of income tax amount). While a few were satisfied with dealing directly with tax agents, many (particularly in metropolitan and regional locations) felt that they needed to be better informed and "educated" about this subject matter.

*"We don't find out much about taxation."—Sydney*

In contrast to the above, overall, there was limited knowledge about which agencies were responsible for:

- superannuation matters
- government-initiated Indigenous policy, services and programs.

Many middle-aged to older research participants indicated that they had very little knowledge about their superannuation and "didn't know who to contact" to find out about "sorting out" their superannuation concerns. While some knew to contact their superannuation fund(s) or the ATO, most didn't know "where [their] super was" held and how to access it.

*"A lot of people don't understand superannuation."—Thursday Island*

*"Our people didn't know how to look for it [lost superannuation]... they didn't even know they had all this money sitting there."—Thursday Island*

It was evident that most participants were aware of 'ABSTUDY' and the free medical treatment from AMS, but few knew about the availability of Indigenous scholarships, traineeships and grants. Furthermore, while most had heard about the Closing the Gap initiative, only a few knew about the range of facilities, programs and services being delivered (beyond access to "free medicines" and "free approved doctors").

*"What does it actually cover other than medical?"—Ballarat*

While some participants assumed that Indigenous community organisations (e.g. Land Council and Aboriginal Co-operatives) may know about some Indigenous policy, services and programs, it was evident that:

- Many perceived these organisations to be mainly responsible for matters associated with land care, health services and cultural heritage rather than citizen-centred government policy, programs and services.



- Many participants (especially in metropolitan and regional locations) were not engaged with Indigenous organisations.

#### 4.4 Timeliness of receiving government communication

Overall, the research found that the type of channels used for government communication influenced perceptions of timeliness. Most participants felt that they tended to find out information in a timely manner through:

- mass media campaigns (especially exposure to television and radio advertising)
- direct telephone or SMS contact (generally only from Centrelink and employment service providers)

*“Most people will give their number to Centrelink because they want to be informed on a regular basis about their payments.”—Thursday Island*

- direct face-to-face contact when prompted to respond by Centrelink and employment service providers.

Some participants also acknowledged that letters from government agencies were received with sufficient time to respond. This mainly included participants living in metropolitan and regional locations, those with a permanent and consistent home address as well as those with proficient English language skills.

In contrast, some others felt that information they received via direct mail (i.e. letters) tended to arrive “too late”, especially when an action was required.

*“The letters are generally not [timely]. Especially if they’re expecting you to get that information back to them at a certain time.”—Cairns*

This finding was particularly prominent among participants who:

- had limited English language skills and relied on others in their family or community to read and convey written information
- did not have a permanent home address and/or were very transient throughout the year, including those who did not regularly update their change of address
- lived in remote and very remote locations where the mail delivery was irregular or affected by weather and/or other environmental elements.

*“When it rains, the roads are all closed off. The mail doesn’t come for weeks.”—Jabiru*

The perceived lack of timeliness with direct mail (i.e. letters) was reported to particularly have a negative impact on the above groups of participants when there was an action required to be taken to avoid:

- penalties or “money being cut-off” (e.g. from Centrelink). Centrelink’s approach of contacting some participants via SMS or direct telephone calls was acknowledged as being “helpful” in avoiding such penalties
- missing out on benefits (e.g. when a form was required to be sent/returned to receive or claim a benefit/payment).

Similarly, many felt that government information through word-of-mouth from family and the community also tended to be “found out by accident” and was often “too late”. Some indicated that they had “missed out” on applying for grants,

scholarships and other benefits due to not knowing about the availability of such assistance in a timely manner.

## 4.5 Appropriateness of language

Overall, the research found that the level of English language currently used in government communications was appropriate and effective for participants with a 'fully-functional' level of English. However, the level of English used in government communications (especially in written form) was generally found to be inappropriate for those with an 'everyday' and 'broken' level of English (see Chapter 3 for findings on differences in English language proficiency).

Key issues identified by participants in relation to the level of language used in government communications included:

- words or terms that were not easily understood, including technical language and formal words that were not commonly used in "normal" conversation

*"There's no use being all technical, no one will understand."—Sydney*

- phrasing that was unfamiliar because it did not reflect the style of oral communication participants were familiar with

*"You've got to paraphrase English in a different style."—Sydney*

- sentences that were too long or "complicated".

*"They need to shorten it."—Parramatta*

Some participants in Cairns and Thursday Island identified an approach used by Queensland Health as being effective in government communications. The approach presented shorter written information in "Aboriginal English" or "broken English" supplemented with images/pictures to enhance understanding. It was felt that this approach helped to increase participants' affinity and engagement with the materials because the language was "easy to relate to" and "simple to understand".

*"They [Queensland Health] write up all this Creole stuff with pictures, it's unreal... they've got a good way of getting it across."—Thursday Island*

Most research participants were not aware of the availability of Indigenous language interpreters for accessing government services. A few participants stated that they had accessed government Indigenous staff who used a "more basic" form of English when communicating with them rather than speaking in their Indigenous language.

*"They put you on the Indigenous line and they don't speak Aboriginal anyway."—Cairns*

In addition, a few participants who had accessed Centrelink's Indigenous helpline indicated that the service was limited to expertise about Indigenous-related payments (e.g. 'ABSTUDY') rather than to speaking in Indigenous languages. Participants who preferred to speak in their Indigenous language reported that they currently accessed government information via an English speaking person who dealt with the matter on their behalf. Many of these participants indicated that they preferred to deal directly with government staff in their own language rather than to rely on someone else to manage their "private" affairs.

*“An interpreter would be good because they have other foreign languages but not Creole.”—Thursday Island*

Many participants suggested that government information should be made available in Indigenous languages similar to translated materials for non-English speaking communities.

#### **4.6 Underlying expectations about government communication**

The research found that most research participants strongly felt that government agencies had responsibility to proactively communicate with them about changes and the availability of services and programs (i.e. “entitlements”).

This attitude derived from strong sentiments that:

- The government had a responsibility and obligation to keep citizens informed and aware of its activities and initiatives.

*“The government is held accountable, it’s important people get services they’re entitled to.”—Ballarat*

- Their action of “voting in the government of the day”, meant the government had a duty to “look out for” them.

It was evident from the research that this attitude, along with the compounding barriers to accessing information, had reduced the likelihood of many participants proactively seeking information directly from government agencies, unless they “had to”. Furthermore, some participants also indicated that even if they wanted to seek out information, they wouldn’t “know what to look for”.

*“If you’re on Centrelink and you get cut off you’re going to have to go in there.”—Thursday Island*

As discussed in Chapter 2, the research found that many middle-aged and older Indigenous participants were sceptical and distrustful of governments in general, mainly from historical experiences between Indigenous people and past governments. This adversely impacted on their willingness and openness to actively seek out government information on their own.

## 5. Media usage

---

### 5.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses research findings about current media usage in relation to mainstream (English) and Indigenous media. The chapter reports on the different purpose and usage of these two media forms amongst research participants.

### 5.2 Overall findings

The research found that most participants accessed both mainstream and Indigenous media channels<sup>7</sup>. In general, the research found a tendency towards using mainstream (English) media in metropolitan and regional locations. In remote and very remote locations, the tendency was towards Indigenous media.

Overall, television was the most common mass media channel utilised by research participants, followed by radio then print media in metropolitan and regional locations.

However, in remote and very remote locations, local radio and print media appeared to be the most commonly used channel, followed by television. Local print<sup>8</sup> and radio were primarily used because they had better coverage of local information, and radio for its inclusion of information in Indigenous language(s).

The following sections present detailed findings about the mainstream and Indigenous media channels used.

### 5.3 Mainstream (English) media

The research found that mainstream media was accessed by participants who had differing levels of English proficiency. TV and radio were commonly reported as being accessed by participants who had ‘fully-functional’, ‘everyday’ and ‘broken’ English. These channels were also used by those who had limited literacy skills. Many of these participants stated that oral information (particularly supported by visual images) made information in English simpler to understand, even for those with limited English proficiency.

*“Everybody sits down and watches TV.”—Alice Springs*

The main purpose for accessing mainstream media included:

- a desire to engage with popular programs
- a need/desire to find out about local and broader issues particularly in metropolitan and regional locations
- the opportunity to expand and develop English language skills.

---

<sup>7</sup> Indigenous media channels included local community channels as well as regional/national channels (e.g. CAAMA radio and NITV).

<sup>8</sup> Print channels targeted at Indigenous communities were reported to be simpler to understand and engage with because of the use of ‘everyday’ English and predominance of visual images.

*"Watching TV is another way to learn English."—Jabiru*

In contrast, only participants who had English literacy skills tended to engage with mainstream print media. Many who reported having limited English proficiency indicated that they were not as comfortable in understanding English in written form as in oral form.

## 5.4 Indigenous media

The research found that Indigenous media channels were used to access information in English language as well as in Indigenous languages.

*"CAAMA advertise in-language...the dialects might change but everyone can understand."—Ceduna*

The types of Indigenous media channels that were used by participants included:

- television: series/programs, movies, sport, documentaries, news and current affairs—e.g. National Indigenous Television (NITV), ABC (e.g. *Message Stick*) and SBS (e.g. *Living Black*)

*"'Message Stick' and 'Living Black' are big on TV."—Sydney*

- radio: talk-back, sport, news, current affairs and music—e.g. CAAMA, Radio Torres Strait, Bumma Bippera, Koori Radio and Nyoongar Radio

*"We get CAAMA radio down here we hear a lot of stuff through that."—Ceduna*

- print media: "stories", news, sport and television program guides—e.g. Koori News, Torres News, National Indigenous Times and Tracker.

*"I buy the 'Koori Mail' and that's how I find out what's happening in the Indigenous community."—Cairns*

Indigenous media was used primarily because it was perceived to be relevant, easy to understand and meaningful. Specifically:

- Content was felt to be relevant and tailored to local as well as broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.

*"It's the best because it's Aboriginal radio. It keeps me connected up north too because I'm from Darwin."—Ceduna*

- Presentation of information was targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences—so the language, tone, talent, imagery and style was easy to understand and was felt to be more meaningful.
- Information was culturally appropriate and supported traditional and cultural norms and practices.

*"Bumma Bippera will take a message from mainstream media and do it in black fella language, those ones stick with me....When Indigenous people own the message, that's what attracts me."—Cairns*

## 6. Overall communication channel preferences

---

### 6.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses the overall preferences of communication channels for government information among research participants. It identifies the primary and secondary preferred channels of communications.

The following chapters (7 to 10) discuss each of these channels in detail.

### 6.2 Overall findings

The research found that most participants preferred and wanted to receive government communication via multiple channels.

*"You can't rely on one way to get the message out, it's a range of ways."—Cairns*

The research identified the need for a range of primary and secondary communication channels to be used to reach Indigenous Australians. This approach was felt to be necessary to maximise access to and engagement with government information, particularly given the diversity of needs, language proficiency and backgrounds among the target audience.

*"Every community is different and you need to have different ones [channels] for different areas."—Cairns*

### 6.3 Primary channels

Overall, the research found that most participants preferred face-to-face communications (including via community events), television and letters. All of these channels were commonly perceived as being important primary channels for government information.

*"It gets across to a lot of people... every household has a TV."—Ceduna*

These channels were found to be highly effective in reaching and engaging with participants about government communications.

*"The best way to contact us is with a letter."—Jabiru*

### 6.4 Secondary channels

Participants identified additional preferred communication channels, however, these were generally found to be more effective as secondary communication channels which supplemented/provided more detail and/or reinforced the primary channels of communication.

These secondary channels included:

- radio
- print media (newspapers and magazines)
- leaflets/pamphlets

*“Pamphlets are easy, on the go you can pick it up and read through it.”—  
Parramatta*

- posters
- government websites
- online advertising

*“Posters do play a role where you can’t get face-to-face... something is better than  
nothing.”—Cairns*

- email
- telephone (hotlines and SMS)
- DVDs/videos.

## 7. Face-to-face communication channel preferences

---

### 7.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses preferences among research participants in relation to face-to-face communication channels.

### 7.2 Overall findings

The research found that most participants commonly identified face-to-face communication as a preferred channel for receiving and seeking government information.

*“You can see the person and they can explain it to you.”—Alice Springs*

Face-to-face channels included those that were:

- formal—directly interacting with government officials as well as with intermediaries representing government agencies (e.g. community organisations)
- informal (i.e. word-of-mouth) channels.

The types of face-to-face interactions preferred by participants are addressed in sections 7.3 and 7.4 below.

Overall, most participants felt that the quality of the information being provided (e.g. accuracy, relevance and currency) was more important than the background of the person delivering the information. However, many participants acknowledged that having a representative that demonstrated cultural awareness and understanding would enhance engagement with Indigenous people.

*“It’s not about skin colour. What’s important is the quality of information you get.”—Jabiru*

Face-to-face channels of communication were preferred because they:

- offered a “two-way” opportunity for dialogue, which allowed for clarification, checking, validation and questions/queries to be asked

*“You get a better understanding. You can ask questions and know who you are talking to.”—Perth*

- provided a tailored approach to issues of relevance to the individual

*“It’s more personal, and you’re more likely to remember it.”—Ballarat*

- allowed a targeted approach in which the pace, level of language and tone could be adapted to the person/audience
- allowed an opportunity for an immediate and timely response/feedback



- allowed supporting tools/materials to be used as a backup or to clarify information (e.g. visual aids, pictures, letters and fact sheets)

*“Sometimes I get them to jot it down for me.”—Cairns*

- enabled interpreters in participants’ Indigenous language(s) to be used (effective for those who preferred information in-language)
- facilitated family and support people to be present and to share the information or to help with the enquiry
- facilitated conveying correct/accurate information. Some participants felt that a face-to-face approach made people more accountable and “honest”. Furthermore, some participants felt that in smaller towns, recognition and familiarity of the provider promoted trust in the information given and received.

The key limitations to face-to-face channels were reported as follows:

- It required effort and organisation to seek out information, and hence some participants were unlikely to use face-to-face channels without sufficient personal need or motivation.

*“There must be something important [otherwise] I won’t bother going.”—Sydney*

- Attending face-to-face meetings was particularly difficult for people with lack of access to transport (e.g. limited public transport, no access to private transport/vehicle and limited finances to spend on petrol or tickets).

*“It’s time consuming to get in your car and go there.”—Ceduna*

- It was difficult for participants who had limited availability or time due to busy schedules and lifestyles, particularly those who were in full time employment.

*“We’re all busy with work and family responsibility.”—Cairns*

- Some participants were reluctant to engage in a formal or official environment due to lack of confidence, poor language and literacy skills, or “not feeling comfortable” in such environments.

*“Not everybody will go into an office and find out stuff... if they feel they don’t know how to express themselves.”—Thursday Island*

The following sections discuss the preferred formal and informal face-to-face channels for government information.

### **7.3 Formal face-to-face channels**

The research found that two types of formal face-to-face communication channels were preferred by participants:

- direct—information directly from a government agency (e.g. visiting government offices, attending public information forums/sessions and going to exhibition stands/booths at community events)

*“It’s good to go into Centrelink and talk face-to-face about your problem.”—Perth*

- indirect—information disseminated indirectly on behalf of a government agency via Elders, leaders and/or organisations (e.g. AMS, Land Council, Congress, Co-operatives and vocational colleges).

*"If it wasn't for Jacaranda [Indigenous community centre] I wouldn't get my information... Once I come here it gets explained to me and it all gets fixed."*—  
Perth

### 7.3.1 Visiting government offices

Some participants indicated that they preferred to go into government offices to deal with issues face-to-face. Key service delivery elements that were considered to be important in these environments to encourage positive engagement included:

- appropriately trained staff—this included staff with subject matter knowledge as well as sufficient cultural awareness/sensitivity
- an office environment that allowed for private/confidential matters to be comfortably discussed
- access to interpreters and/or Indigenous staff when language barriers were an issue, or when matters being discussed were culturally sensitive.

*"Some Indigenous people don't even want to talk to a white person... they have to make you feel comfortable."*—Roebourne

In addition, participants living in remote and very remote locations indicated the need for government outreach staff to visit their communities to provide them with current and accurate information. This was particularly important for these participants as they had limited access to government offices (i.e. due to distance, transportation and financial barriers). Therefore outreach workers were one of their sole sources of formal face-to-face communication in these locations.

*"We don't contact government people... unless someone comes from the government to talk to us."*—Jabiru

### 7.3.2 Community events

Some participants reported that they had attended information forums and/or exhibition booths/stalls at community events and found these sessions to be highly useful. They provided participants with the opportunity to engage and receive information, as well as seek out further information (e.g. via questions and answers).

*"If they've got information to be shared, why aren't they here doing it?"*—  
Roebourne

They questioned why they were not used more widely by government agencies. In general, most participants indicated that they were likely to attend such events. However, participants also recommended that the following elements be considered to encourage community attendance:

- giving people sufficient notice—i.e. two weeks or more
- widely advertising the session—e.g. local radio, local press, leaflet drops and posters around commonly used community facilities
- having multiple sessions to cater to working and non-working families/participants

*"There was a seminar a few years ago and it was the wrong time of day, people were working."*—Ceduna

- holding it at a central and easily accessible location—e.g. close to public transport
- providing free transport to and from the session—e.g. hired bus
- ensuring a hospitable, “welcoming”, comfortable and “relaxed” atmosphere—e.g. BBQ and provision of food and drinks

*“Have food to serve out... a BBQ, people will come for that.”—Jabiru*

- providing ‘show bags’ with leaflets and other information as well as promotional items (e.g. wrist bands, hats and t-shirts), including who to contact for more information/follow-up

*“Stalls work. They always have stuff to give away.”—Sydney*

- using an informal style of presentation—e.g. “not a lecture at a podium”

*“It would be better to come down and have a yarn, not where everybody’s too frightened to stand on their toes.”—Ceduna*

- having culturally aware, sensitive and appropriate presenter(s) and government representative(s)—e.g. dress style, tone and awareness of local cultural norms
- demonstrating respect for the local community—e.g. use of local interpreters and Elders or Traditional Owners to introduce speakers and sessions/events to encourage community ownership of the session.

*“Engage the community and ask them how they want to do it.”—Jabiru*

Exhibition booths/stalls were found to be useful and widely accessed at community events such as:

- NAIDOC Week
- locally themed festivals/events (e.g. Ceduna Oyster Fest and Torres Strait Cultural Festival on Thursday Island)
- sporting events/competitions (e.g. football matches).

*“NAIDOC Week’ would be the ideal time for community events.”—Ceduna*

### 7.3.3 Intermediaries

Indigenous community organisations and intermediaries were favoured by some participants, particularly those in remote and very remote locations and/or participants who did not wish to deal directly with government. They were reported to be useful as channels through which to engage with, and “make sense” of government information. Participants felt they were effective for reaching the local community because they were culturally appropriate and locally based. They provided a “comfortable” environment for receiving substantive information and direct assistance.

*“Jacaranda [Indigenous community centre] is really good here, it’s like a family and that’s how they treat me.”—Perth*

Intermediary organisations that were identified as being useful for disseminating information included:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander co-operatives and councils

*“The majority of Aboriginal co-ops, that’s where you get the message from.”—  
Roebourne*

- Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS)/clinics

*“AMS is a great way to get information out.”—Sydney*

- employment service providers
- welfare agencies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land organisations (e.g. Land Council)
- state and local government agencies (e.g. councils and shires).

The research found that Elders and Traditional Owners currently played a limited role in communicating and disseminating government information. Participants indicated this was due to the following:

- The role of Elders and Traditional Owners had disintegrated in some communities (particularly in metropolitan and regional locations). This was attributed to the erosion of “traditional ways”, the integration of Indigenous people into “mainstream culture”, dispersion of Indigenous communities in cities, and Elders passing away and their role not being replaced.

*“Most of them have passed away.”—Alice Springs*

- Elders and Traditional Owners were felt to be largely unfamiliar with government systems and processes as their role tended to be focused towards traditional aspects, cultural ceremonies and heritage issues. Many participants felt that it was inappropriate for Elders to take on responsibility for government information.

*“The only thing we would give a message for is a funeral or corroboree or ceremony but for government information we can’t.”—Jabiru, Elder group*

- Some participants preferred to “keep personal matters private” and within their family as opposed to approaching Elders or Traditional Owners. This was particularly the case with information relating to income, as “humbugging” was a concern among these participants.

The research found that in remote and very remote communities, Elders and Traditional Owners had a prominent, respected and distinct role. In such cases, participants generally agreed that Elders and Traditional Owners could play a facilitation role in relation to government communication. However, this tended to be in relation to organising, hosting and facilitating government speakers rather than the active dissemination of information.

*“Organise a summit and bring the Elders in and that Elder can contact everybody else.”—Thursday Island*

## 7.4 Informal face-to-face channels

Informal face-to-face communication in the form of word-of-mouth was also identified as being a necessary and preferred channel for government information.

*"It's [word-of-mouth] like a grapevine. We've got the fastest telecom in Australia."—Ceduna*

This channel of communication was reported as being widely used across all locations, particularly in remote and very remote locations. The prevalence of word-of-mouth channels was mainly due to its prolific nature and simplicity of presenting/delivering information in an easily understandable form.

*"Yarning, that's the main way."—Cairns*

However, some participants were concerned about the accuracy and validity of information that was received via word-of-mouth.

*"You have to be careful they pass on the right message."—Cairns*

While some participants indicated that they tended to access additional channels to validate/authenticate information received via word-of-mouth, others took on the information at face-value because it came from a trusted source or they had "no other choice" (e.g. due to limited literacy and lack of access).

*"Sometimes the information will go stray and the story will change."—Thursday Island*

## 8. Mass media communication channel preferences

---

### 8.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses preferences among research participants in relation to mass media communication channels.

### 8.2 Mass media

Overall, the research found that most participants identified mass media—television, radio and print—as an important, relevant and preferred set of channels for receiving government information. Among all the mass media channels, television was clearly the most preferred channel followed by radio and then print. Local Indigenous radio and print were particularly important and preferred channels, especially in remote and very remote areas.

*“Everybody has a TV, it’s as simple as that.”—Ballarat*

Research findings about each of the mass media channels are discussed in detail below.

### 8.3 Television

Overall, the research found that most participants preferred television as an effective way of receiving and engaging with government information.

*“People have a TV but not everybody has a computer or iPad.”—Perth*

Television was preferred by participants in metropolitan, regional, remote and very remote locations where it was readily accessible and there was good signal quality. However, a few participants indicated that television was not a suitable channel for some very remote communities where signal quality was poor and/or watching television was not part of their lifestyle because they tended to live in a more “traditional way”.

*“Most of our locals are sitting outside around the fire at night time, they don’t watch TV.”—Jabiru*

For most participants who preferred television as a key communication channel, it was considered to be a wide-reaching and pervasive form of media. Many participants indicated that they accessed government information from news and current affairs programs as well as from “watching the ads”.

Even some participants who indicated that they tended to not watch advertisements (e.g. turned down the volume or walked away) still stated that they tended to eventually see the advertisement, be aware of the “gist” of the advertisement or know about it from others in the household or community.

*“You’ve got no choice [to watch ads].”—Ceduna*

*"Ads would be good to make people understand... it sinks in eventually."—Alice Springs*

It was common for participants to report that information from government advertisements was "passed on by word-of-mouth" or discussed in the community, especially if the government advertising contained Indigenous-specific information.

Further evidence of the effectiveness of television in reaching Indigenous participants was provided by the high recall of government advertisements on television (e.g. anti-smoking, healthy eating, digital switchover and road safety).

*"The way they try to stop people drinking and driving with kids in the car... it tells a story."—Alice Springs*

Most participants stated that it was "easy" to recognise government advertisements due to the identification of the government logo (crest) and the end authorisation frame. However, some participants indicated that because the same style of end authorisation tended to be used for political advertising (e.g. elections), this made it difficult to decipher the purpose of the advertising from government, especially during election periods.

The most commonly reported television consumption period was in the mornings (before 10am) and evenings (after 4pm), especially among participants who were working. Day time television viewing occurred among participants who were older, at home caring for family or who were unemployed.

*"...people are watching TV, from 6 or 7 o'clock through to 10pm."—Thursday Island*

In general, participants appeared to watch a range of television stations, with choice being driven by programming rather than preference for particular stations. However, there was a clear preference towards programs/shows that contained local content (e.g. news). In some cases, there was also a clear preference for ABC and SBS due to their limited commercial content and wider Indigenous content (e.g. *Message Stick* and *Living Black*).

*"'Redfern Now' on the ABC, it's just a show we Aboriginal people get."—Ceduna*

There was widespread support for NITV being moved to free-to-air television and many hoped that the variety of Indigenous content would increase on this station. This move was viewed positively not only because it made Indigenous content more readily available to an Indigenous audience, but also because it made their issues, culture and heritage available to the wider population.

*"That new TV channel [NITV], that's fantastic."—Ballarat*

Most participants reported that they watched free-to-air stations as well as pay TV (e.g. 'Foxtel' or 'Austar'). Pay TV (especially in the form of satellite) access appeared to be more prominent in regional, remote and very remote locations where free-to-air reception was poor.

*"A lot of people have 'Foxtel' here but they change back for the news."—Roebourne*

Television programs watched ranged according to personal interest. However, commonly watched television programs included:

- news—e.g. the evening news on commercial channels, ABC and SBS
- current affairs programs—e.g. *Q&A*, *Sunrise*, *7.30 Report*, *60 Minutes*, *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight*

- sports programs—talk shows as well as matches/games especially in relation to NRL, AFL and American basketball

*“I get stuck to the TV when the footy is on.”—Perth*

- drama—e.g. *Home and Away*, *Neighbours*, *Redfern Now*, *Revenge* and *Packed to the Rafters*

*“That’s when all the good shows are on, like ‘Home and Away’.”—Cairns*

- crime shows—e.g. *CSI* and *Law and Order*
- reality TV shows—e.g. *Masterchef*, *Australian Idol* and *X Factor*
- documentaries—mainly on ABC, SBS and Foxtel
- home improvement shows—e.g. *Better Homes and Gardens*
- music programs—e.g. *Rage*.

Television was generally preferred as a communication channel for government information because:

- It allowed a “story” to be told—thus, making it easy to engage with and understand.

*“The smoking ads, they’re eye-catching because it’s scary. You see the start and the ending of what happens if you’re smoking.”—Thursday Island*

- It usually used language that was simple to understand and easily accessible as it reflected “how people talked”.
- It used and engaged with multiple senses such as oral and visual which meant that it was a good proxy for face-to-face communication.
- It allowed for passive engagement as no action or effort was required to access it because it was freely available in almost all homes.
- The relevance and subject matter could be quickly determined and easily identified so participants were able to decide on whether they wanted to engage with the subject or not.

*“If it’s an ad about slaughtering turtles or dugongs I’ll watch it because it’s about us.”—Thursday Island*

Limitations identified in the research with television being used as the **only** channel for government communication included:

- Only a limited amount of information was able to be conveyed in a short news clip or advertisement. A reference of where to access more detailed information (e.g. website or telephone number) was often necessary.
- People with poor signal quality or limited access to television particularly in very remote areas may not have access.

*“You go out further and there’s no TV or radio out there.”—Jabiru*

The research also found that exposure via television was reliant on media weighting (i.e. frequency and time of day run) and other communication strategies to enhance cut-through (refer to Chapter 12).

*“I think time slots make a big difference too.”—Ballarat*



## 8.4 Radio

The research found that, overall, radio was a preferred channel to reach and engage **many** participants.

Radio could be easily accessed regardless of location and therefore had widespread reach amongst participants. It was preferred by participants across all locations—metropolitan, regional, remote as well as very remote locations. Generally, older participants and participants working in blue collar jobs were more likely to frequently engage with radio than other participants. These participants had “more time” to spend listening to the radio, or listened to it while at work.

*“When I’m on the construction site working it’s [radio] on all day.”—Cairns*

Participants who preferred radio as a key channel for communication considered it a pervasive form of media that was available to everyone. Many participants reported that they accessed government information from listening to talk-back radio, interviews, news and current affairs programs and radio advertisements. Participants reported that radio was an effective communication channel through which to introduce and reinforce information.

*“Especially with the cyclones, we have the radio on all the time.”—Roebourne*

The research found that not all participants who listened to the radio had strong engagement with the information being presented. Some participants reported that they played the radio “as background noise” and only “half listened” while concentrating on other activities (e.g. driving and working).

*“We’re not just sitting there listening to it, you can do other things.”—Jabiru*

Participants reported that they either listened to the advertisements when they were played, or “tuned out” to them. Only a few participants reported that they actually changed the station or turned off the radio. Most participants who stated that they disengaged when the advertisements were played still indicated that, if information was repeated, they were likely to eventually “absorb” the information regardless.

*“It goes in one ear and out the other, but if you hear it enough you know what’s going on.”—Jabiru*

Additionally, many participants indicated that information received through this channel was often “passed-on” and discussed in the community. This was particularly the case for information that related specifically to Indigenous communities or for information that used Indigenous elements in its presentation (e.g. Indigenous language, talent or music).

Most research participants stated they identified government as being the source of ads from the end authorisation announcement. Some participants also felt that government advertisements tended to have a similar “tone” or sounded the same.

*“All government ads sound the same.”—Parramatta*

*“At the end they usually say ‘spoken by so and so’.”—Alice Springs*

Most participants reported that they listened to the radio in the morning (before 9am) and in the evenings (after 5pm). This was especially the case for participants who were working, as it was often played in the car or bus while driving to or from

work. Older, blue collar workers, stay-at-home parents and unemployed participants were more likely to report listening to the radio throughout the day.

The research found that participants listened to a range of radio stations. However, there was a clear preference for stations and programs that contained local and Indigenous content. Older participants and participants in remote and very remote locations tended to listen more to Indigenous radio stations. Younger participants and participants in regional and metropolitan locations listened to commercial stations, as well as Indigenous stations.

*“We get CAMMA radio down here. It’s the best because it’s Indigenous.”—Ceduna*

While programs and stations varied according to individual preference, the most popular included:

- news
- current affairs programs via talk-back

*“I listen to talkback 6PR.”—Perth*

- music.

The research indicated that radio was preferred as a communication channel for government information because:

- It required limited effort—it was a way to effortlessly receive and access information as it was freely available to everyone.
- The language used was usually simple and “easy” to understand—programming was generally presented in conversational English or in Indigenous language.

*“Radio because some can’t read.”—Alice Springs*

- The relevance and subject matter could be determined relatively quickly—so participants were able to decide whether they wanted to engage with the subject or not.
- The content could be targeted to the local community context—this included tailoring words, language, talent and music to be locally specific.

*“When we get [radio] ads it’s translated into three dialects from English.”—Thursday Island*

The research identified the following limitations to using radio as the **only** communication channel for government information:

- It lacked detailed information—advertisements as well as programs were perceived to contain less detail than other media forms. This meant a reference to the availability of more detailed information was often necessary (e.g. website or telephone number), but such information was commonly reported to be difficult to note as participants were “doing other things” (e.g. driving or working) while listening to the radio.
- It lacked the reinforcement of visual content—many participants indicated that visuals were important to them when communicating a message, especially if English proficiency was limited.
- It had limited depth of engagement—as many participants reported doing other activities while listening to the radio, their attention to the information was often limited. Therefore, like TV, frequency of exposure was important.

## 8.5 Print media

Overall, the research found that only some participants preferred print media (particularly local publications) for receiving government information, particularly:

- middle-aged and older participants
- participants with better English literacy (i.e. ‘fully-functional’ English)
- those living in remote and very remote locations (though support for this channel was evident across all locations).

Most participants who engaged with print media indicated that they read both the content and the advertisements, as it was often hard to distinguish between the two and the advertisements tended to “catch” their eye (particularly when advertisements used Indigenous elements e.g. colours, designs or talent).

Government information in print media was accessed either through the articles or advertisements. Most participants indicated that they could easily identify a government advertisement in print media due to the government logo/crest, references to government websites and the subject matter.

*“They have government ads in our newspapers.”—Thursday Island*

The research found that many participants had “set aside” or “cut out” information they felt would be relevant for friends or relatives to “pass it on”. Many participants also reported that they often discussed the details of information they had read with others. Additionally, the research found that print media tended to be widely circulated among occupants of a household, organisation and/or community.

*“If one person in the house reads it [newspaper] they pass it on... like black fella message.”—Cairns*

Participants were generally more likely to read newspapers than magazines. Participants reported that newspapers were appealing as they were generally “cheaper” than magazines, in some cases free, and were more likely to contain locally specific information. In some remote and very remote locations, newspapers were one of the main sources for local news, and hence were widely read and circulated.

*“The Islander, it’s a free paper that comes out and it’s written by people who live around here.”—Thursday Island*

Newspapers that were read also tended to be primarily in hard print copy rather than online/electronic format. Frequency of newspaper consumption (i.e. in hard print copy format) varied according to participants. Some read them on most days of the week and others read them once a week or less regularly. Newspaper readership was reported to occur at work, in transit, at cafés/restaurants or at home. Some participants paid for the newspapers they read and others only read newspapers that were available for free, or in places where it was a common/shared property (e.g. work).

While a few participants indicated that they “just flicked through” the newspaper, most had stronger engagement and read the articles and advertisements that interested them.

Types of newspapers that were read included:

- Indigenous newspapers—e.g. *Koori Mail* and *National Indigenous Times*

*“The ‘Koori Mail’, a lot of people read that.”—Thursday Island*

- local newspapers—usually free and delivered to the home

*“I read the local paper and the ‘Herald Sun’.”—Ballarat*

- paid national newspapers—e.g. *The Australian*
- paid metropolitan newspapers—e.g. *Herald Sun, The Age, Sydney Morning Herald, The West Australian, The Advocate* and *NT Times*
- free metropolitan newspapers—e.g. *MX*.

Sections of newspapers that participants stated they “enjoyed” reading included:

- the sports section

*“The sports when the footy is on. When the footy finishes people hardly buy ‘The Sentinel’.”—Ceduna*

- articles and headlines on the front page and in the front section
- job advertisements
- classifieds
- TV guide
- (mainly among older participants) death notices.

*“All my uncles and aunties read the death notices.”—Perth*

Only a few participants reported that they purchased magazines themselves. Instead, participants reported that they read magazines in waiting rooms (e.g. medical centres) and at cafés/restaurants. Types of magazines that were read included:

- *Women’s Day, Women’s Weekly, New Idea, That’s Life* and *Better Homes and Gardens*—read by female participants
- car and boat magazines (e.g. *Wheels*) as well as AFL, NRL and other sports publications—read by male participants.

Advantages of print media as a channel for government communication were reported as follows:

- It allowed for detailed information.
- The information could be physically “passed on” to others.
- Information could be “set aside” and referred to later on.

*“You can read about it and if you don’t understand you can ask a person who does.”—Alice Springs*

- Engagement with the media was strong—participants had already “opted in” (often financially but also with their time/attention) and hence were engaged with the media.
- The content could be targeted to the local community context—this included tailoring words, language, artwork and talent to be locally specific and relevant.

*“The Torres News break it right down for us.”—Thursday Island*

The research identified access as a key limitation to using print media as the **only** channel for government communication, specifically:

- Literacy and English proficiency skills—participants who had limited literacy or poor eyesight could not access the channel.
- Availability—some participants “missed out” on receiving newspapers or magazines due to their location (i.e. remote and very remote).
- Cost—some participants had financial constraints that meant that purchasing newspapers and magazines was not a priority.

*“It [magazines] costs something for starters.”—Perth*

## 9. Internet communication channel preferences

---

### 9.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses the preferences of research participants in relation to the internet as a channel for government communications. It reports on overall findings, as well as specific findings about government websites, online advertising and social networking.

### 9.2 Overall findings

Overall, the research found that only **some** participants preferred the internet for accessing government information.

The internet was used and preferred as a channel of communication by participants who were:

- younger and middle-aged

*"It's [internet] for the younger ones."—Thursday Island*

- living in regional and metropolitan areas
- better educated and who had better English language proficiency and literacy skills
- working in white collar industries.

*"I use the internet at work, not at home."—Sydney*

Others participants who did not use or prefer this channel of communication identified the following key reasons for their lack of usage:

- Cost—there was a financial cost associated with accessing computer equipment and plans/"downloads".

*"If you had 200 grand you can afford the internet but for people under 30 grand, you can't do it."—Ceduna*

- Limited access to technology—participants in remote and very remote locations indicated that their remoteness contributed to poor quality/reliability of internet services. Also, remoteness was commonly attributed to impeding availability of equipment either through direct ownership (e.g. lack of competitive cost) or through community facilities (e.g. community centres, libraries and internet cafes).

*"It can't be assumed that most Aboriginal people have computers because they don't."—Sydney*

- Low information technology literacy—many participants indicated that they were “uncomfortable” or “did not know” how to use computers.

*“I don’t even know how to turn it [computer] on and off.”—Cairns*

- Limited English proficiency—many indicated that a requirement for using the internet was English language proficiency and literacy skills, which was perceived to be limited in particular cohorts of people (e.g. middle-aged and older participants as well as people living in remote and very remote locations).

While some (particularly younger and middle-aged) participants indicated that they accessed the internet via their telephones, this was predominantly to use certain applications such as Facebook rather than to source information.

The research found that, among participants who preferred the internet as a channel for government information, websites and online advertisements were the most preferred avenue rather than social media channels. Each of these channels is discussed in detail below.

### 9.3 Government websites

Overall, the research found that government websites were the main channel preferred by **some** participants to seek-out government information or to respond to compliance requirements.

A few participants reported that they used government websites as a result of seeing an advertising campaign, other government material and/or through information passed on via word-of-mouth. A few others found such websites through search engines or “stumbled across” the information while online.

*“I heard it on a radio or TV ad and then decided to find out more information [on website].”—Ceduna*

Some participants (usually Centrelink customers) mainly used specific government websites (i.e. Centrelink) for functional purposes (e.g. to submit a form or to respond to a trigger event).

*“It’s easier than going into the Centrelink office.”—Ceduna*

The research identified the following advantages of government websites as a channel for communication:

- provision of immediate and timely information

*“It’s just quicker to look online.”—Ceduna*

- provision of detailed information and the availability of additional sources (i.e. further links) for clarification and validation
- delivery of credible and direct information from the government agency responsible for the subject matter
- facilitation of alternative service delivery options (e.g. form submission and income estimation update)

*“I lodge E-tax on the internet.”—Thursday Island*

- ease of engagement through the use of multiple approaches (i.e. information presented in written, visual and oral form)

- easy dissemination and sharing of information with family, friends and other community members (e.g. via email, printing hard copy and sharing links via Facebook).

*“Not everybody’s computer literate. If I read something I’ll share it.”—Thursday Island*

The research identified access as the key limitation to government websites being used as a channel of communication for government information, specifically that it was:

- restricted to people with good English language proficiency and literacy skills
- limited to people with internet access.

The research also found that many participants avoided using this channel based on the assumption that the navigation and language would be overly “complicated” and it would be “too hard” to find relevant and useful information.

*“The websites are the same, it’s just bureaucratic language. I used to look for grants all the time but now I don’t bother.”—Ballarat*

## 9.4 Online advertising

Overall, the research found that only **a few** participants identified online advertising as a preferred channel for communicating government information.

Non-government websites commonly accessed by research participants included:

- Ebay and other online shopping sites (e.g. travel)

*“I only go to ‘Yahoo’, ‘Nine MSN’ and ‘Google’.”—Cairns*

- news sites (e.g. *Nine MSN*, *ABC News* and *The Age*)
- television broadcaster sites to download and watch shows (e.g. ABC, Channel 10 and Channel 7)
- online video sites (e.g. *You Tube*)

*“‘You Tube’ is the best one for those ads.”—Ceduna*

- search engine sites (e.g. *Google*).

In addition to online advertising through the abovementioned sites, the research also indicated that cross-promoting information on commonly accessed government websites (e.g. Centrelink) would be effective in reaching the target audience.

There was generally a preference towards automated advertising (e.g. played at beginning of online videos on You Tube, online TV shows and music as well as news sites) rather than ‘click through’ forms of advertising. However, use of online videos was limited, mainly due to concerns about download limits. Access to online videos appeared to be more prevalent among younger research participants than middle-aged and older participants.

‘Click through’ advertisements were generally found to have limited effectiveness, as they tended to be “ignored” because of:

- concerns around contracting computer viruses

*“Who looks at internet ads? They’re mostly spam.”—Cairns*



- concerns around the cost of downloads (e.g. “waste of money”)
- the need to take action (i.e. clicking) and the associated time delay (i.e. loading speed) associated with its use.

*“For me or anyone who’s computer literate, you know they’re ads and you don’t click on it.”—Parramatta*

The research identified the following advantages to using automated online advertisements for communicating government information to a select target audience:

- It “couldn’t be avoided” due to the compulsory nature of having it played before a video.

*“On ‘You Tube’ you have their ad and you can’t skip for five seconds.”—Cairns*

- It captured an audience that was already prepared to pay for downloads (i.e. already committed to watching the selected video).
- It was an engaging medium because of its oral and visual story-telling approach (as per television advertising).
- It allowed conversational style language to be used, thus being simpler to understand.
- It facilitated passive engagement (i.e. just required to watch).
- It was easy to recognise the source and subject matter of the advertisement.
- It enabled immediate follow-up by replaying the advertisement or seeking further information on the internet.

## 9.5 Social networking

The research found that social networking was widely used among younger and middle-aged participants as well as participants living in metropolitan and regional locations. This channel of communication appeared to be largely accessed via mobile phones rather than personal computers.

Facebook was the main social networking application used among research participants. The use of Twitter, Instagram and other similar applications was limited.

*“A lot of it is just ‘Facebook’ in Aboriginal communities, ‘Twitter’ is not as interactive.”—Sydney*

While the research found that there was widespread usage of Facebook among participants, most participants felt that this channel was not suitable for direct communications by government agencies because:

- It was considered an “invasion of privacy” for government to be involved in people’s “personal business”.

*“It’s [‘Facebook’] like a journal, they can see your stuff.”—Alice Springs*

- It was a platform used for social and personal purposes, and hence was considered inappropriate and “not serious” for “important” subject matters associated with the government. Such a platform was considered to potentially reduce the authority and credibility of government information.

*"There's lots of Koori things on 'Facebook' and our mob don't want government people seeing it."—Sydney*

- Its benefits as a two-way communication channel were unlikely to be maximised because participants would not 'like' or 'befriend' government organisations, as it was "uncool" to do so and/or due to privacy concerns.

*"To be honest you probably wouldn't 'like' the page on 'Facebook'... particularly for kids it's not cool."—Cairns*

- Its advertising opportunities were limited because most participants accessed Facebook via their telephones and hence, advertising space was limited.

However, some participants indicated that Facebook could be used as an appropriate and effective channel to disseminate government information through Indigenous and not-for-profit organisations. A few participants indicated that they had engaged with and 'friended' these organisations via their Facebook page. These participants reported that they regularly received information feeds through this channel.

# 10. Other communication channel preferences

---

## 10.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses other direct and indirect communication channels preferred by research participants for government information and communication.

## 10.2 Overall

The research found that there were two other forms of government communication channels preferred by participants:

- direct—including letters, telephone calls, SMS and emails from government agencies
- indirect—including leaflets/pamphlets, posters and DVDs/videos.

The following sections discuss these direct and indirect channels for government information.

## 10.3 Direct contact

The preferred channels for receiving direct government information were identified in the research as letters, telephone calls, SMS and email from government agencies.

Overall, the research found that **most** participants preferred letters as a channel for receiving government information. While some preferred telephone calls, SMS and emails, most other participants indicated that they were reluctant to provide government agencies with personal details that allowed immediate contact.

Research findings about each of the direct contact channels are discussed in detail below.

### 10.3.1 Letters

The research found widespread preference among participants for letters as an appropriate and effective channel for receiving government information. Furthermore, most participants indicated that letters that were personally addressed were more likely to encourage readership than general letters addressed to the household.

Most participants indicated that generic letters (e.g. to the householder) were unlikely to be opened or widely read, due to:

- the belief that the letter would be unimportant and “not urgent” because it was “impersonal” as the intended recipient was not directly identified

*“It’s better with our name because you know to open them.”—Jabiru*

- the assumption that the letter was “junk mail” or from “political parties” campaigning
- key recipients not seeing the letter as it may not be shared amongst everyone in the household, especially in larger households where the people opening the mail may not be the key decision-makers or owners of the house.

*“Sometimes I go to the post office and I see all the ‘to the householders’ on the floor.”—Thursday Island*

In contrast, most research participants indicated that they were more likely to “pay attention” to letters that were directly addressed to them. In general, the research found that a personally addressed letter from the government (identifiable from the government “crest”) would likely be assumed to contain “important information”. Some participants also indicated that, for specific Indigenous information, their engagement and likelihood of readership would be enhanced if the letter displayed Indigenous design or imagery on the front (e.g. the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander flag).

*“The stamp on the letterhead is important.”—Sydney*

Most participants indicated that they either read personally addressed government letters themselves, or sought assistance from “trusted” family and/or friends in reading and understanding the letters.

The research identified the following key advantages to letters as a channel for communicating government information:

- It was personal and hence, assumed to be relevant, important and to contain targeted information.
- It was perceived to demonstrate “respect from government” because effort had been put into sending a personal letter. Moreover, it showed that government was fulfilling its duty of care.
- It was in a medium that allowed information to be “passed on to others” and shared.
- It provided a reference point for seeking clarification and enabled detailed information to be conveyed. It also enabled the verification of information received through other channels (i.e. word-of-mouth).
- It “came” to individuals without requiring them to seek out information and thus, facilitated equitable access.

The following were identified as potential key limitations of letters as the only channel of government communication:

- Its written form made it difficult to access for participants with reduced English proficiency and literacy as well as poor vision—though many indicated that they (and others in this situation) tended to have trusted sources to go to for assistance in reading and understanding the content of government letters.

*“A lot of the letters, you may as well sit there with a dictionary. Some of the words are really hard.”—Cairns*

*“Everybody helps, we’re all one big mob.”—Roeibourne*

- It was subject to delays due to infrequent or disrupted mail delivery (i.e. in remote areas) or because of transient lifestyles. In addition, this method of communication was also subject to infrequent collection by some recipients (e.g. some participants only collected their mail from post boxes or family members on a weekly or monthly basis).

### 10.3.2 Telephone

Overall, the research found that telephone was preferred by only **some** participants, and mainly as a secondary channel of communication for government communications.

The types of telephone channels preferred were:

- SMS for receiving notifications (as was currently done by Centrelink)—especially among younger participants

*“SMS, they’re pretty good. You can read them.”—Alice Springs*

- contacting free helplines for further information—especially among middle-aged and older participants.

*“Old people won’t play around with mobile phones. They’ll ring the hotline or get someone to call for them.”—Thursday Island*

The research found that some participants appeared to be more comfortable with giving government agencies their mobile telephone numbers to receive SMS notifications than to receive direct phone calls. Some suggested that SMS would be a particularly good way of notifying them that agencies had sent them letters, especially those who had to collect their mail from post boxes or other addresses.

Participants who favoured SMS notification as a communication channel tended to be younger, and those who were already receiving such forms of notifications from Centrelink and employment providers. These participants commonly felt that SMS offered the advantages of being immediate/timely as well as a proof of reference/notification.

*“Centrelink text you as well... to tell you about appointments or that you got an online letter.”—Cairns*

Most research participants were reluctant to receive telephone calls or SMS messages from government agencies because of concerns about their privacy, particularly that “government would be checking up” on individuals. Others indicated that they were unfamiliar with SMS services as they only used their “mobile phones for calling”. These participants also reported that they would be unlikely to answer calls that came from government agencies and unidentified numbers.

*“I’ve got a mobile now and it’s the first time I’m using it but I can only answer when somebody’s calling me.”—Jabiru*

*“Giving out numbers is a bit personal.”—Alice Springs*

Many participants felt it was important to have this channel available, especially with access to Indigenous staff and interpreters for:

- the elderly

*"It's good for it to be a 1800 number so that people who don't have money can afford it."—Alice Springs*

- those who didn't have access to the internet
- those living in remote areas.

*"It's faster than walking or flying to another place."—Jabiru*

The advantages of free-call government helplines were identified as follows:

- They offered a two-way channel of communication which facilitated clarification and understanding.
- They facilitated ease of access, especially for those who were physically isolated or had financial constraints which limited their face-to-face access with government agencies.

Some participants indicated they would use government "free hotlines". However, many of these participants had formed negative perceptions of government helplines due to their experiences with:

- voice-automated systems that were commonly perceived to be impersonal and "difficult" to understand and follow

*"The frustration is the waiting and the passing around. A lot of Island people get so frustrated they just hang up"—Cairns*

- lengthy delays of "waiting to be served"
- all costs, especially as many tended to only have access via mobile phones

*"The 1800 numbers, you can't call on prepaid phones."—Perth*

- difficulty in understanding the staff on the telephone because they "spoke too fast" or "unclearly"—many were also not aware of the availability of/access to staff who spoke Indigenous language(s).

*"People get scared if they think they're not going to be understood."—Thursday Island*

### 10.3.3 Email

Overall, only a **few** participants (mainly white collar workers) identified email as a preferred channel of communication for government information.

*"If you're working it's easier to access during the day."—Ceduna*

The research found that email usage was limited among research participants. Participants indicated that their email usage tended to be limited to work related rather than personal matters.

*"Most people never read them [emails]."—Perth*

The few participants who preferred email, identified the following advantages to using this channel for government communication:

- It facilitated ease of sharing the information with others in the community.

*"The people that do have email will sometimes print it off and pass it on to their family."—Ceduna*

- It enabled follow-up with questions directly to the sender.
- As per letters, it provided a reference point for seeking clarification and enabled detailed information to be conveyed. It also enabled the verification of information received through other channels (i.e. word-of-mouth).
- It was a medium in which information could be tailored to the needs of the recipient and therefore, was likely to be relevant.
- It offered an immediate and timely way of communicating with the recipient.

However, similar to the findings relating to telephone, most research participants were reluctant to provide their personal email address to government agencies because of privacy concerns and fear of being inundated with government communications. Only a few participants indicated that they were more likely to provide their work rather than their personal email details to counter these concerns.

*“It depends what it is... sometimes it clogs your inbox and you’ve got all that spam and junk mail there.”—Ceduna*

## 10.4 Indirect contact

The preferred indirect channels for receiving government information were identified as leaflets/pamphlets, posters and DVDs/videos.

Overall, the research found that **many** participants preferred all these indirect channels for receiving government information. These channels were considered important secondary channels for reinforcing and supporting government information from other primary channels.

Research findings about each of these channels are discussed in detail below.

### 10.4.1 Leaflets/pamphlets

The research found that leaflets/pamphlets were preferred for receiving government information among **most** research participants across all locations.

While some participants reported that they were likely to pick-up leaflets/pamphlets themselves, others indicated that they would only read the material:

- if it was handed to them directly and they were told of its relevance (e.g. by government staff, intermediaries or family/community member)
- if they received it in the mail.

Some participants reported they would be more likely to read leaflets/pamphlets received in the mail with an accompanying letter, as this would highlight the importance and relevance of the materials. Additionally, if received together, it was felt that leaflets/pamphlets provided an effective visual supplement to the letter and hence, would be more likely to enhance message take-out.

*“You read the letter and then there’s pictures and stuff in the pamphlet.”—Alice Springs*

In contrast, other participants indicated that they preferred simply receiving a leaflet/pamphlet on its own, as they did not want to be inundated with reading material.

Participants identified the following places as appropriate for distributing government leaflets/pamphlets:

- hospitals, AMS and health clinics
- post offices
- Indigenous community organisations and facilities
- education facilities

*“In the school, you’ve got parents who go and pick up their kids and they’ll take a leaflet.”—Jabiru*

- welfare agencies
- sporting clubs/organizations

*“We put leaflets up in [football] clubs and we couldn’t keep up with the demand.”—Sydney*

- government offices (federal, state and local)
- community events—as a hand-out and in information stalls/booths.

The research identified the following key advantages to leaflets/pamphlets as a channel of government communication:

- They facilitated the visual display of information and hence, increased readership and understanding.

*“It’s good for the people who are transient because English is a second language and they can understand a picture.”—Ceduna*

- They provided a hard-copy reference material that could be shared with others in the community.
- They could be made freely and easily accessible if distributed in places frequented by the target audience.
- They allowed information to be tailored to local context and language needs (e.g. words, phrasing, images and talent).

The following were identified as potential key limitations of leaflets/pamphlets being used as the only channel of government communication:

- Their written form made it difficult to access for participants with limited English proficiency and literacy as well as poor vision—though many indicated that they (and others in this situation) tended to have trusted sources to go to for assistance in reading and understanding the information. This was also less of an issue for leaflets/pamphlets than for other written communication channels due to the ability to incorporate imagery to complement the text.
- They could become easily out-dated in places of dissemination where old materials were not replenished or withdrawn.
- They could be mistaken for “junk mail” and thrown out, if they arrived via direct mail without being personally addressed.

*“If something doesn’t have my name on it I’ll chuck it out.”—Sydney*



## 10.4.2 Posters

The research found that posters were a preferred channel for receiving government information for **most** research participants.

In addition, posters were identified as being an effective secondary channel for raising awareness, supporting and reinforcing government information. The research found this channel was more effective if supplemented with other communication channels (e.g. TV, radio advertisements or information sessions). Many participants reported they often noticed posters after they had seen a TV advertisement for the same campaign.

*“They might put a poster out, but if they don’t actually tell us... they have to explain themselves too.” —Jabiru*

Posters were found to be a preferred channel of communication particularly for:

- participants from regional, remote and very remote locations—this method overcame some of the geographic barriers to accessing information experienced by these participants (e.g. lack of access to transport and technology)
- participants with limited English language proficiency and literacy due to the highly visual nature of this channel.

Dissemination points identified among research participants for maximising exposure to posters containing government information included:

- supermarkets and shopping centres

*“Everybody reads Jim’s IGA notice board because there could be a bargain there.” —Ceduna*

- public transport buildings and shelters (e.g. bus stops)
- hospitals, AMS and health clinics
- post offices
- welfare agencies
- sporting clubs/organisations
- Indigenous community organisations and facilities
- education facilities
- government offices (federal, state/territory and local)
- community events.

The advantages of using posters as a communication channel for government information included the following:

- They were an effective medium for visually displaying information.

*“People can look at pictures and understand.” —Jabiru*

- Their use of imagery and bright colours increased appeal and cut-through of information.
- They were freely and easily accessible to everyone in the community.
- They allowed information to be tailored to local context and language needs (e.g. words, phrasing, images and talent).

*“If I see a black person on there I think I’ve got to go and read that.” —Cairns*

The research identified the following key limitations to using posters as the only government communication channel:

- They contained limited information and needed to be supplemented with other material.
- They were subject to being vandalised (e.g. altered and “pulled down”) and hence, needed to be replaced regularly. A few participants reported that government posters were a target for vandals in their communities.

*“Posters get ripped down for scrap paper... if there’s a government poster next to a real estate poster they’ll take the government one.”—Thursday Island*

### 10.4.3 DVDs/videos

The research identified DVDs/videos distributed via locally based government offices (e.g. Centrelink) and intermediary organisations as another preferred way of receiving government information. Many participants felt that DVDs/videos would be an effective supplementary channel for detailed information.

*“In some offices you go they have little videos playing.”—Perth*

This channel was preferred by participants across all locations who had regular face-to-face dealings with government offices and/or intermediary organisations.

Participants felt the following places would be appropriate for distributing and showing DVDs/videos in the community:

- in government office waiting areas
- in health clinic waiting areas
- in schools/education facilities
- at community events/information sessions.

The research identified the following advantages of using DVDs/videos as a supporting communication channel:

- Information was able to be presented in a way that “told a story”.

*“If you catch it from the start you can learn a lot.”—Perth*

- Longer and more detailed information was able to be provided.
- It was an oral and visual medium that engaged multiple senses, which increased engagement and catered for those who liked to receive information orally and visually.

*“I just like anything to watch.”—Jabiru*

- It required limited effort to engage—it was a way to passively receive information as people were already congregating at offices/organisations.
- The content could be targeted to the local community context by using local language, music and featuring local talent.

*“I remember 15 years ago they made a movie about child pregnancy...it was done locally and everybody was watching it.”—Thursday Island*

- It was likely to promote discussion within communities and lead to spreading of the information via word-of-mouth.

# 11. Engagement with government communications

---

## 11.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses the research findings in relation to participants' engagement with government communications.

## 11.2 Differences in engagement behaviour

As discussed in previous chapters, the research found that participants were more likely to wait to receive government information than to actively seek it out. Their preference was also towards receiving rather than seeking out government information.

The research also found that once participants received information, the extent of their engagement with the information was determined largely by the communication style and approach (see Chapter 12). In contrast, engagement was found to be higher for participants who had sought out information themselves as the relevance of, and hence their interest in, the information had already been established.

The research identified three likely behaviours of engagement with government communications:

- Segment 1: easy to engage—participants who are relatively easy to engage with about government communications: “I make it my business to know”
- Segment 2: somewhat easy to engage—participants who are only somewhat easy to engage with about government communications because internal and external factors are likely to impede their full engagement: “I want to know but am constrained”
- Segment 3: difficult to engage—participants who are difficult to engage with about government information: “I don’t want to know”.

The research suggested that a combination of attitudes as well as demographic and environmental factors influenced the likely engagement with government information and hence, the make-up of each segment.

The nature of qualitative research means that it is not possible to provide reliable estimates of the sizes of the above segments. However, for indicative purposes, in terms of relative sizes:

- Segment 2 appeared to be the largest (comprising most participants).
- Segment 1 appeared to be the second largest (with some participants).
- Segment 3 appeared to be the smallest (with only a few participants).

Each of the above segments is described in more detail in the following sections.

### 11.3 Segment 1: easy to engage—“I make it my business to know”

Overall, the research found that participants in Segment 1 were likely to be relatively easy to engage with because they were interested, open to and understood the benefits of knowing about government information that related to them. They were motivated by not “wanting to miss out” or to “get caught out” by non-compliance or inaction.

*“It’s important to know what’s going on.”—Ballarat*

Segment 1 typically comprised participants who actively sought information and promptly responded to received information.

*“You just have to read it now because they might have to go in today. It might be important.”—Alice Springs*

Segment 1 participants tended to be better aware of government changes, policies and initiatives (e.g. Closing the Gap and Centrelink assistance) and were generally aware of which government agencies to contact for information (e.g. ATO for taxation and Centrelink for family assistance). They often noted that they would “just Google” if they were unsure of which agency to contact.

Segment 1 participants tended to be easier to contact and access by government agencies because they:

- had a stable and permanent home address
- used multiple channels of communication—e.g. mass media, internet, social networking sites, email and SMS.

*“Most of the time I’m on the laptop at work and I read the news when I get home.”—Thursday Island*

Segment 1 participants appeared to be better equipped than those in the other segments to engage with government communications as they tended to:

- be better educated with good English proficiency and literacy and numeracy skills
- have better information technology capability and access

*“The internet is really good to give you information.”—Jabiru*

- be more media savvy, accessing multiple media channels (e.g. TV, radio, print and internet)
- have strong social networks of family and friends in the community.

As a result of some of the above factors, many Segment 1 participants appeared to:

- have more interest and knowledge of political and current affairs issues, especially relating to government matters

*“If it’s going to affect the community in anyway, that’s the main point.”—Roebourne*

- check, compare and validate information they received from government through multiple channels.

*"I don't trust the information one bit... that's why I use the computer to double check the websites."—Ceduna*

A common characteristic among Segment 1 participants was that they either tended to be a conduit of information for their community or to have trusted and established family and community sources to access government information.

*"To be a leader, to find it and pass it on to others."—Ballarat*

The research found that Segment 1 participants were more likely to be:

- white collar workers
- middle-aged to older participants
- living in metropolitan and regional areas.

#### **11.4 Segment 2: somewhat easy to engage—"I want to know but am constrained"**

Overall, the research found that participants in Segment 2 were likely to be only somewhat easy to engage with about government communications because internal and external factors were likely to impede their full engagement.

Participants in Segment 2 were interested and open to knowing about government information, but did not necessarily recognise the personal benefits of knowing such information. They commonly reported "missing out" or "getting caught out" by inaction through finding out about government initiatives and changes "too late".

*"We've missed out on things because we didn't find out till it was over the time."—Sydney*

Segment 2 typically comprised participants who did not actively seek-out information, but responded to received information.

Segment 2 participants tended to be less aware of, and commonly held myths and misconceptions about, government changes, policies and initiatives (e.g. Closing the Gap and Centrelink assistance). Unlike Segment 1, Segment 2 participants were generally unaware of which agencies to contact for information, beyond Centrelink and the AMS.

*"You have to know what to look for."—Alice Springs*

*"How can you go looking for something if you don't know what you should be looking for?"—Jabiru*

Segment 2 participants tended to be harder to contact and access because of the following **external** factors:

- They were more transient than Segment 1 participants, so tended not to have stable or permanent addresses and did not regularly update or change their details.
- Their access to multiple channels of communications was limited because of
  - infrequency, or lack of reliability of the delivery of letters and print media due to weather or remoteness
  - poor television signal quality due to remoteness
  - poor quality and/or costly access to internet and mobile telephone services

*"I haven't got a phone, nothing."—Jabiru*

- lack of transportation (i.e. public and private) and/or cost barriers of transportation (e.g. ticket and petrol as well as vehicle registration and road worthiness) to easily visit government agencies.

*“Some people don’t have a vehicle.”—Alice Springs*

- Their remote location meant that they were more physically and socially isolated.

Segment 2 participants appeared to be less equipped than those in Segment 1 to engage with government communications because of the following **internal** factors:

- They tended to be less educated.
- They had poorer English proficiency as well as literacy and numeracy skills, especially in written form.

*“A couple of my grandmothers, their only signature is a cross. They can’t read or write.”—Roebourne*

- They had limited information technology capability and/or access.

*“I don’t even use the computer, I wouldn’t know how to turn it on.”—Ballarat*

- They were less media savvy and tended to access fewer media channels (e.g. TV and radio).
- They were heavily reliant on word-of-mouth as a communication channel.

As a result of the above external and internal factors, many Segment 2 participants appeared to:

- have less knowledge of political and current affairs issues, especially relating to government matters
- be reliant and dependent on government information being directly sent or given to them

*“I just wait for a letter.”—Alice Springs*

- have a stronger expectation than Segment 1 of the role and duty of care of government agencies to keep them aware and informed about government changes, policies and initiatives.

*“...don’t know where to go or what to ask for.”—Ballarat*

Segment 2 participants tended to be heavily reliant on other sources (e.g. family, friends and intermediaries) to receive, understand, convey and/or interpret/translate government information for them. Therefore, Segment 2 participants’ direct personal access and engagement with government information was significantly constrained compared with Segment 1.

*“Someone who’s older helps, who knows more than us.”—Alice Springs*

The research found that Segment 2 participants were more likely to be:

- transient in their living arrangements
- receiving income support payments or be blue collar workers
- living in regional, remote and very remote areas.

## 11.5 Segment 3: difficult to engage—“I don’t want to know”

Overall, the research found that participants in Segment 3 were likely to be participants who were difficult to engage with about government information.

*“What if I don’t want to know the government?”—Roebourne*

Compared with participants in Segments 1 and 2, participants in Segment 3 were neither interested nor open to knowing about government information.

*“If you vote then you’ve got to keep on voting. If you don’t sign up then you get fines, best thing then is don’t sign up so you don’t get fined.”—Roebourne*

Segment 3 typically comprised participants who were passive towards seeking and receiving government information. They tended to only seek or respond to received information when there was a trigger event that directly impacted on them personally (e.g. cessation of Centrelink payment).

*“They think ‘government, you’re going to lose’ in their head before they even go there.”—Jabiru*

*“If it affects you financially, that’s when you take notice.”—Cairns*

Unlike Segment 2 who were generally unaware, Segment 3 comprised a mix of participants who were informed as well as uninformed about:

- key government changes, policies and initiatives
- which government agencies to directly source information from.

Furthermore, while some Segment 3 participants appeared to experience similar external and internal constraint factors as Segment 2, others did not.

The commonly identified barrier to engaging with government information among Segment 3 participants was their entrenched negative attitudes towards and expectation of government. These attitudes and expectations appeared to be formed from direct as well as indirect experiences relating to government.

*“If it’s a government ad then I don’t want to know.”—Jabiru*

*“I don’t care what the government has to say. I don’t trust them, they’re not interested in our mob.”—Sydney*

*“Whatever happens, happens. It’s going to happen whether I like it or not.”—Alice Springs*

While some Segment 3 participants tended to be heavily reliant on other sources (e.g. family, friends and intermediaries) to receive and deal with government information on their behalf, others were capable of relating to the information on their own.

The research found that Segment 3 participants were evident across all ages and locations, but were more likely to include participants receiving income support payments.

## 12. Style preferences for maximising engagement with government communication

---

### 12.1 About this chapter

This chapter discusses research findings about elements that relate to communication style.

Initially the chapter goes through the overall style preferences identified by research participants as being important in attracting their attention and effectively engaging them.

Subsequent sections provide more detail about each of these stylistic elements from design, talent, local content, text and layout, government branding, and music through to tone.

### 12.2 Overall communication style preference

The research found that a range of stylistic elements played a key role in facilitating cut-through and promoting affinity with government communications among participants. These elements were important to maximise the likelihood of attracting attention and engaging with participants. Furthermore, these elements contributed to enhancing the perceived relevance and importance of the communications.

### 12.3 Design

The research found that the general design of government communications played an important role in establishing relevance, affinity and cut-through among participants. This was primarily because design strongly contributed to visual appeal and was effective in reinforcing messaging in a simple and easy to understand manner compared to written or text-based information.

Given that many participants strongly identified a preference for visually presented information, this finding is not surprising. The role of effective design elements on government communications was reported as being particularly important for participants with limited English language proficiency and literacy.

*“Most Indigenous people are visual.”—Cairns*

The research found that elements of design which positively enhanced engagement with communications included:



## Colour

- General colour—bright colours were commonly reported by participants to be “eye catching”, inviting and to draw their attention.
- Traditional colours—it was clear from the research that different traditional colours had a stronger affinity, “connection” and meaning to Aboriginal as well as Torres Strait Islander participants.

*“We see our colours first, then we know it connects to us.”—Sydney*

- For Aboriginal participants, the colours red, black and yellow, ochre/orange, as reflected by colours of the Aboriginal flag, the “desert” and the land tended to have stronger affiliation.
- For Torres Strait Islander participants, the colours blue, green and white, as reflected in the colours of the Torres Strait Islander flag and environment, had a strong association. While most Torres Strait Islander participants indicated that they recognised the Aboriginal colours as applicable to the broader Indigenous people (including Torres Strait Islander people), some felt that the use of these colours did not adequately capture the role and diversity of the Indigenous population but rather reflected the “dominance of mainland culture”.

## Imagery

- General imagery—pictures, images and visual aids were found to be particularly important elements to assist understanding and reinforce key message take-out among participants. An example that was commonly identified by participants in the north of Australia was the dengue fever campaign which centred on the image of the affected mosquito and its living environments.

*“I remember a few months ago they had the Dengue ad on TV and it really caught your eye and made everyone aware.”—Thursday Island*

- The research found that cartoon/animation was an effective and appealing approach for communicating key messages among participants with low literacy and English language skills. Such an approach also effectively avoided cultural sensitivities incurred by the use and display of photos of deceased people. This approach was particularly favoured by participants in remote and very remote locations as well as younger and older audiences.

*“My grandma loves animated pictures...for the young people and the old people you need pictures.”—Cairns*

- However, the use of cartoons/animation was found to be potentially offensive and patronising for middle-aged participants and those living in metropolitan and regional areas, where English language proficiency and literacy tended to be higher.
- Traditional imagery—like the finding relating to traditional colours, different traditional images was also found to have stronger affinity, relevance and association to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.
  - For Aboriginal participants, the Aboriginal flag, local styles of artwork/dot paintings and images of kangaroos, snakes and other animals tended to have strong cultural significance and affinity.

*“No one else has the dots...the artwork tells a story in itself.”—Parramatta*

- For Torres Strait Islander participants, the Torres Strait Islander flag, style of artwork reflecting head pieces and totems, and images of birds, fish, turtles and other water animals tended to have strong cultural importance and affinity.

*“If it’s for Torres Strait Islanders it will be a Torres Strait Island flag and head dress.”—Thursday Island*

The research found that Indigenous specific design (e.g. imagery, artwork and colours) was mainly necessary for engaging with the different Indigenous groups on matters that targeted that audience specifically (e.g. Indigenous specific campaigns) rather than on matters that affected all Australians (e.g. mainstream campaigns). Most participants in metropolitan and regional locations indicated that separate Indigenous design was not required to engage them on general matters that affected the wider Australian community.

However, it was evident that remote and very remote Indigenous participants preferred such Indigenous design to maximise cut-through and affinity even on general matters (e.g. mainstream campaigns). This was mainly because most participants in remote and very remote areas still maintained their traditional lifestyles—and hence, communications containing Indigenous design offered more familiarity, approachability and comfort.

*“It does catch my eye if you see flags there or Aboriginal cartoons.”—Jabiru*

## 12.4 Talent

Similar to the findings relating to design, talent was an important stylistic element that contributed to affinity, cut-through and credibility of communications.

The research found that to maximise effectiveness, communications targeted at all Australians should be visually representative of the general population. Many Indigenous participants were concerned that mainstream/general communication approaches had limited coverage and recognition of Indigenous Australians. The research found that it was important for general communications (e.g. campaigns) to include Indigenous Australians especially in scenarios where a range of talent was depicted to represent the Australian community. The inclusion of Indigenous Australians (regardless of whether they were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) was considered appropriate and necessary to maximise interest, engagement and affinity. However, most participants felt that the inclusion of Indigenous talent/representation was not as critical in certain styles of communications where there was a focus on a single talent (e.g. case-study/testimonial approach) or scenario.

*“If something effects everyone they should have Indigenous and non-Indigenous in there.”—Thursday Island*

*“I’ve seen a big mob of ads about being an Australian and you don’t see any Aboriginal people there. You only see white people and people from overseas.”—Alice Springs*

In contrast, the research found that, to maximise effectiveness, communications targeted specifically at Indigenous Australians should include Aboriginal as well as Torres Strait Islander people. In addition, such targeted communications should also represent the diversity of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups in the community.

For example, Aboriginal groups represented should include a variety of people:

- from different communities who live inland and on the coast
- by skin tone
- with different accent/pronunciation
- across different locations—metro, regional, remote and very remote.

For Torres Strait Islander people, the diversity of people who live on mainland and on the inner and outer islands should be reflected.

In addition to the diversity of people, many participants felt it was important to show a diversity of socio-economic groups/lifestyles in the talent portrayed. There was a common perception among participants that Indigenous people were often portrayed negatively by the media. This limited and undesirable reflection of Indigenous people was felt to contribute to negative stereotypes of this audience among the general community.

In terms of using celebrity versus non-celebrity talent, most participants indicated that celebrities were effective in attracting their immediate attention and cut-through to a subject matter (especially Indigenous celebrities) but not for longer-term cut-through, affinity and believability.

Using celebrities was perceived to be generally effective in raising awareness or initially promoting a program/policy change or initiative. Celebrities included prominent sports people, musicians, actors and artists.

*“If you get an AFL star to put the message out every kid will pay attention.”—  
Roebourne*

Examples of Indigenous celebrities that were considered to be respected, credible and effective in reaching Indigenous audiences included:

- Jessica Mauboy
- Mary G
- Ernie Dingo
- Cathy Freeman
- Deborah Mailman.

*“People the kids can relate to, Ernie Dingo, Mary G, any NRL star.”—Thursday  
Island*

However, the research suggested that participants were likely to “switch off” after the initial exposure to celebrities in awareness raising communications. The research also found that the sense of achievability and believability of celebrities in communications relating to behaviour change/social marketing tended to be less effective and relevant. This was because celebrities did not hold as strong affinity with participants on these more “serious” subject matters, because they were not necessarily perceived to be “at the same level” or to possess the same “personal circumstances” (especially experiences of “hardship” and poverty) as most “normal people”. In such behaviour change/social marketing campaigns, the use of non-celebrities was commonly reported to be more “real”, “relatable” and “achievable”. For example, the anti-smoking advertisements targeted at Indigenous Australians were felt by many participants to be effective and salient because they represented a “normal person”.

*“You should use the Aboriginal role models to get the message across.”—Sydney*

*"They don't necessarily need to be famous. More of a role model, someone we're familiar with."—Cairns*

Furthermore, the research indicated that calls-to-action that required behavioural change or changes in entrenched norms were more likely to be effective when they were supported by local talent. This was mainly due to the visible and recognised positive-role modelling depicted by local people in the community making change seem believable and achievable.

*"A local identity for me. Someone I'm familiar with and have respect for."—Thursday Island*

However, when using local talent as role models participants identified a number of key components that would affect their appropriateness and effectiveness:

- They had to be well respected in the community.

*"If it's someone ripping off the system then I won't believe it."—Thursday Island*

- They had to maintain the positive behaviour they were promoting.
- Authorities had to seek the permission of families to continue using the local talent if/when the person passed away.

*"You must ask [permission] ...if the family says yes, yes and if the family says no, no."—Ceduna*

The use of local talent and environments was particularly important and appreciated in remote and very remote areas which had limited coverage and exposure of their region.

*"The channels aren't our local channels until after 7pm...we don't really get interested until they come on."—Ceduna*

## **12.5 Amount of text and general layout and format**

The research found that most participants (regardless of research location) found written information unappealing. The amount of text used in government communications was frequently reported as being "too much to read", with large amounts of text perceived to be daunting and to discourage readership. It was clear from the research that text needed to be kept to a minimum to encourage readership among the intended target audience.

*"If there's fine print and 4 paragraphs it's a no go."—Ballarat*

*"You get these letters from Centrelink and you think, 'what on earth?' Shakespeare is easier to decipher."—Ballarat*

The research identified the following general suggestions for the amount of information that was considered appropriate for encouraging readership by most participants:

- letters—limited to 1 to 2 pages in length
- leaflets—no more than 4 DL panels
- posters—headline plus a few dot points of key information.

*"Try and be a bit short, just one page."—Alice Springs*

Many participants acknowledged that there would be instances where there was a need for more extensive information to be conveyed (e.g. websites, letters and booklets). In such cases, they felt that the information should be structured to capture the key messages up front in a broad manner, followed by more detailed information. This approach would enable participants to identify and differentiate the important information that they needed to read from the “not so important” information.

The research found that the following layout and formatting components were helpful in encouraging readership:

- headings and sub headings—considered important to attract attention but should only include key words in short sentences
- dot points—generally preferred to paragraphs of text. Dot points were perceived to be easy and simple to read, whereas paragraphs were generally perceived to be wordy, lengthy and “easy to get lost in”
- white space and images/pictures—considered to be important to break-up text and reduce the appearance of “text heavy” information
- font style—preference for clear and large sized font for ease of reading. This was particularly important for elderly participants and participants with limited eyesight (e.g. those with macular degeneration due to diabetes).

*“Dot points are good because you can follow along and get to the point.”—Parramatta*

## 12.6 Government branding

The research found that participants were able to identify the source of communications as coming from the Australian Government due to the:

- Australian Government crest/coat of arms
- authorisation messages (on mass media advertising)
- website addresses (i.e. ‘.gov.au’).

*“That little logo thing is at the end.”—Alice Springs*

*“At the end it says ‘www.gov...’”—Parramatta*

The research also found that knowing the source of the communications was important because it contributed to the authority, believability, credibility and validity of the information being presented. Even some participants who indicated that they tended to “ignore” or be “afraid” of receiving communications from the government, stated that knowledge of the source was necessary for the above reasons.

*“When you use the government logo I think you take it seriously.”—Cairns*

## 12.7 Music

Overall, the research indicated that the inclusion of music in communications (i.e. mass media campaigns) was dependent on the subject matter and needed to be matched appropriately to that subject matter.

*“You have to be careful what you put on.”—Cairns*

In general, music was reported to be effective in initially attracting attention and contributing to the mood/tone of the information. However, some participants felt that music should not be played over the top of voices as this detracted from and

made the key messages difficult to be heard and understood. This issue was a particular concern for middle-aged to older participants as well as those with limited English language proficiency.

*It's [music] distracting. I'd rather they just talk.*—Alice Springs

Consistent with the findings relating to design, most participants felt that it was appropriate and suitable for mainstream/general communications to include non-Indigenous music. However, many felt that the use of Indigenous music in targeted Indigenous communications was necessary to enhance its relevance, affinity and cut-through. Furthermore, the research found that there were significant differences in the music preferences and associations among and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

*If you hear a didgeridoo playing you know it's a black fella ad.*—Parramatta

The research indicated that the sounds of the didgeridoo and clapping-sticks were considered to be appealing and generally culturally appropriate across the different Aboriginal groups. In contrast, most Torres Strait Islander participants indicated that Torres Strait Islander music was somewhat different to Aboriginal music as it had greater emphasis on drums, and the didgeridoo was not a key feature.

*We have our own music in our own language... If it's traditional it will grab your attention more.*—Thursday Island

## 12.8 Tone

The research found that tone contributed to perceptions of credibility and believability, and hence affected engagement and call-to-action as a result of exposure to government information. Most participants felt that it was particularly important for government communications to have an appropriate tone because Indigenous audiences were more wary and sceptical of governments due to the authority they held and the community's negative historical experiences with previous governments (e.g. the Stolen Generation).

The research identified the following tones as being appropriate for government communications:

- matter-of-fact tone—to promote awareness and understanding of changes in a factual, straight to-the-point and honest manner i.e. “without any spin”
- serious tone—to facilitate an authoritative and official “voice of government” for information that required immediate action

*It has to be serious, they can't be joking.*—Alice Springs

- positive/encouraging tone—to promote reassurance, support and achievability

*They don't scream and yell at you like the other ads, they talk to you. I like listening to somebody who's talking to me.*—Cairns

- friendly/helpful tone—to enhance approachability, openness and genuineness of information being conveyed
- non-patronising tone—although important to use simple language that was easy to understand, most participants felt it was important for government communications to avoid “sounding insulting” or “dumbed down”.

*If they sound like they're talking down to us it doesn't work.*—Sydney

# 13. Conclusions and recommendations

---

## 13.1 Conclusions

Overall, the research findings indicated that Indigenous audiences, like other groups in the community, comprise a wide range of people with different communication needs, preferences and expectations from government.

The research indicated that most Indigenous audiences were more likely to wait to receive government information than to seek it out. This was primarily driven by the widespread expectation that government agencies had a duty of care to proactively notify citizens of their entitlements and changes which affected them.

Key motivators to seek out government information included:

- having prior knowledge that something was changing, occurring and/or available (e.g. via word-of-mouth, media or advertising)
- feeling comfortable to ask and search for information
- a belief that information sought would be personally (e.g. avoid penalties) and socially beneficial (e.g. helping others in the community)
- a desire to be informed and knowledgeable.

Key factors enabling the receipt of government information included:

- being able to physically access the information
- being able to understand and engage with the information received.

Indigenous audiences, like their mainstream counterparts, experienced barriers that impeded their capacity to effectively access government information. These barriers included:

- language and literacy skills
- income
- health issues
- locational factors
- lack of knowledge—i.e. not knowing what to look for (e.g. “I don’t know what I don’t know”).

Indigenous audiences were found to have a unique set of barriers that impacted on their capacity to successfully receive, seek and engage with government information. These barriers included:

- a higher degree of transiency
- cultural and traditional differences between and within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups
- negative history with governments.

The research identified the following three segments among Indigenous audiences in relation to government communications:

- Segment 1: people who are easy to engage
- Segment 2: people who are somewhat easy to engage
- Segment 3: people who are difficult to engage.

The research found that a combination of attitudinal, demographic and environmental factors appeared to contribute towards steering people into one of these three segments.

The research indicates that adopting strategies that differentiate between the following elements would maximise the effectiveness of government communications:

- primary and secondary sources of information
- mainstream and Indigenous media channels for general information and Indigenous specific information
- levels of English proficiency (i.e. 'everyday' or 'broken' English) for oral and written communications.

The research suggested that the following strategies would maximise communication effectiveness with people likely to be **easy to engage (Segment 1)**:

- having direct communication by government agencies via direct mail and all mass media channels
- facilitating information seeking via websites, visiting and calling government agencies as well as picking up leaflets/pamphlets
- using mainstream media for general information and Indigenous media for Indigenous specific information
- ensuring oral and written communications are in 'everyday' English.

For those people who are only **somewhat easy to engage (Segment 2)**, the research suggests that the following strategies would maximise communication effectiveness:

- using government agencies as the primary source of information, supplemented by intermediaries as the secondary source of information
  - providing information via direct mail, posters, leaflets/pamphlets and mass media channels of TV and radio
  - facilitating information seeking via face-to-face (e.g. visiting offices, attending information sessions and community events) and oral (i.e. telephone with interpreter access) channels
- using mainstream media (TV and radio) and Indigenous media (TV, radio and print) for general information, and Indigenous media for Indigenous specific information
  - incorporating Indigenous design, talent and music for government communications via Indigenous media channels to maximise affinity, cut-through, perceived importance and relevance
- ensuring that oral communications are in 'everyday' English and Indigenous languages
- ensuring written communications are in 'everyday' and 'broken' English.



The research identified the following strategies for maximising communication effectiveness with people who are **difficult to engage (Segment 3)**:

- using intermediaries as the primary source of information and government agencies as the secondary source of information
  - providing information via direct mail, posters, leaflets/pamphlets and mass media
  - facilitating information seeking via face-to-face (e.g. visiting offices) and oral (i.e. telephone with interpreter access) channels
  - using Indigenous media (TV, radio and print) for general information and Indigenous specific information
  - incorporating Indigenous design, talent and music for government communications via Indigenous media channels to maximise affinity, cut-through, perceived importance and relevance
- ensuring oral communications are in 'everyday' English and Indigenous languages
- ensuring written communications are in 'everyday' and 'broken' English.

Having an appreciation of the different segments of people and their communication preferences, enables government agencies to better target and tailor their communications to maximise engagement with Indigenous audiences.

## 13.2 Recommendations

It was clear from this research and other government communications research undertaken by ORIMA Research that there are many factors to consider when developing communication strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The research identified a number of principles to provide general guidance for government communications in a broad sense, but subject matter and issues specific research as well as expert advice are critical components to developing effective communications strategies.

Based on the research findings, the following general guiding principles should be considered in government communications with Indigenous audiences:

### Principle 1:

**Use an 'everyday' level of English.** This level of English is a basic/colloquial level and adequate for day-to-day interactions/living. People with this level of proficiency have limited English vocabulary and grammar. They can understand both spoken and written English to some degree, but have trouble understanding more complex words and phrases.

### Principle 2:

**Use multiple channels of communication.** This is important to deliver reach as well as to reinforce information delivery and understanding. It will also ensure that people who do not have a permanent home address are more likely to be exposed to the information.

### **Principle 3:**

#### **Choose strategies based on information preferences and demographic profile.**

Online and technology-based channels (e.g. SMS) are likely to have lower usage among middle-aged to older participants and those living in remote and very remote locations. Face-to-face and other channels (e.g. visiting or calling government offices) that require considerable individual effort are unlikely to be used by younger people and those living in metropolitan and regional areas.

### **Principle 4:**

**Use mainstream as well as Indigenous media.** This will ensure reach of government communications across all segments as well as cater for different language and literacy skills and those in different locations.

### **Principle 5:**

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples share similar media consumption and channel preferences.** Cultural background in itself does not seem to influence media consumption or channel preferences among Indigenous audiences.

### **Principle 6:**

**Use culturally specific elements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Indigenous specific campaigns.** Incorporating suitable Indigenous design, talent and music for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is important to maximise their engagement and affinity with government communications targeted specifically at Indigenous audiences.

### **Principle 7:**

**Be an active provider of information.** Government agencies should provide information proactively and not assume that the target audience will seek out information on their own, without being notified to do so. There is a strong underlying expectation among most Indigenous people that government agencies have a responsibility to communicate about changes and availability of services and programs (i.e. “entitlements”).

# Appendix A: Demographic profile of research participants

---

The demographic profile of research participants presented below<sup>9</sup> shows that people from a wide range of demographic backgrounds participated in the research.

## **Age:**

- 18–25 years–20%
- 26–30 years–10%
- 31–40 years–24%
- 41–50 years–22%
- 51–60 years–17%
- 61–70 years–6%
- Over 70 years–1%

## **Gender:**

- Female–51%
- Male–49 %

## **Marital status:**

- Single–53%
- Married–20%
- De facto/partnered–20%
- Divorced/separated–3%
- Widowed–4%

## **Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin:**

- Aboriginal–79%
- Torres Strait Islander–14%
- Both Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander background–7%

---

<sup>9</sup> Percentages are based on the total number of valid responses made to the question being reported on. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

**Children under 16 living at home:**

- One-11%
- Two-14%
- Three-7%
- Four or more-12%
- None-56%

**English as the main language spoken at home:**

- Yes-59%
- No-41%

**Highest level of education completed:**

- Under year 10-23%
- Year 10 or equivalent-23%
- Year 11 or equivalent-13%
- Year 12 or equivalent-11%
- TAFE, Diploma, Certificate-22%
- University degree-8%
- Other-2%

**Centrelink payments received (multiple responses possible):**

- Austudy-3%
- ABSTUDY-4%
- Youth Allowance-10%
- Parenting Payment (Partnered)-6%
- Parenting Payment (Single)-7%
- Newstart Allowance-21%
- Disability Support Pension-9%
- Age Pension-3%
- Carers payment or allowance-4%
- Family Tax Benefit (FTB)-11%
- Child Care Benefit (CCB)-2%
- Other-5%
- No payments-32%

**Work status (multiple responses possible):**

- Working full time–37%
- Working part time–11%
- Working on a casual basis–9%
- Retired–5%
- Home duties–7%
- A student–14%
- Unemployed–16%
- Other–5%

**Annual total household income:**

- Under \$30,000–49%
- \$30–59,000–34%
- \$60–89,000–13%
- \$90–119,000–3%
- \$120–149,000–2%