Australian Government

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

#ADRC21

Harnessing community networks responding to COVID19: The case of African migrants in Melbourne's Public Housing

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NSW GOVERNMENT | Resilience NSW

OUTLINE

▶1 Social networks for DRR

▶2 Pre-pandemic social and spatial interactions

▶3 COVID 19 lockdown

▶4 Methodology

▶5 COVID19 response support networks

▶6 Lessons learnt

Social networks for disaster prevention and response

- Understanding the social ties and networks are crucial to address the multiple-issues emerging in post-disaster recovery (Sadri et al., 2018)
- Exploring the nature of networks in “normal” times leads to understanding of how to access better resources improving the network diversity, how community networks are established and expand, how governance influences policy or how an effectively shaped network can build on their capacities (Varda et al., 2009)
- Limited understanding of the networks’ dynamics in disaster or non-routine times (Jones & Faas, 2017; Sadri et al., 2018; Varda et al., 2009) and particularly how the social infrastructure impact the capacity of the community to recover (Aldrich & Meyer, 2014).
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR, 2015, pp. 21-22) through its “Built Back Better” ethos highlights the importance of engaging multiple stakeholders.

Our work with the community

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

COVID-19 Arts + Culture Business + Economy Cities Education Environment + Energy Health + Medicine Politics + Society Sc

Paris? Melbourne? Public housing doesn't just look the same, it's part of the challenges refugees face

April 18, 2019 10.38am AEST

Public housing in Paris (left) and Melbourne (right) has similar impacts on residents' integration into the community. Wissem Felah, Sandra Carrasco, Author provided

THE CONVERSATION
Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Search analysis, research, academics...

Arts + Culture Business + Economy Education Environment + Energy Health + Medicine Politics + Society Science + Technology

Our lives matter – Melbourne public housing residents talk about why COVID-19 hits them hard

July 24, 2020 5.53am AEST

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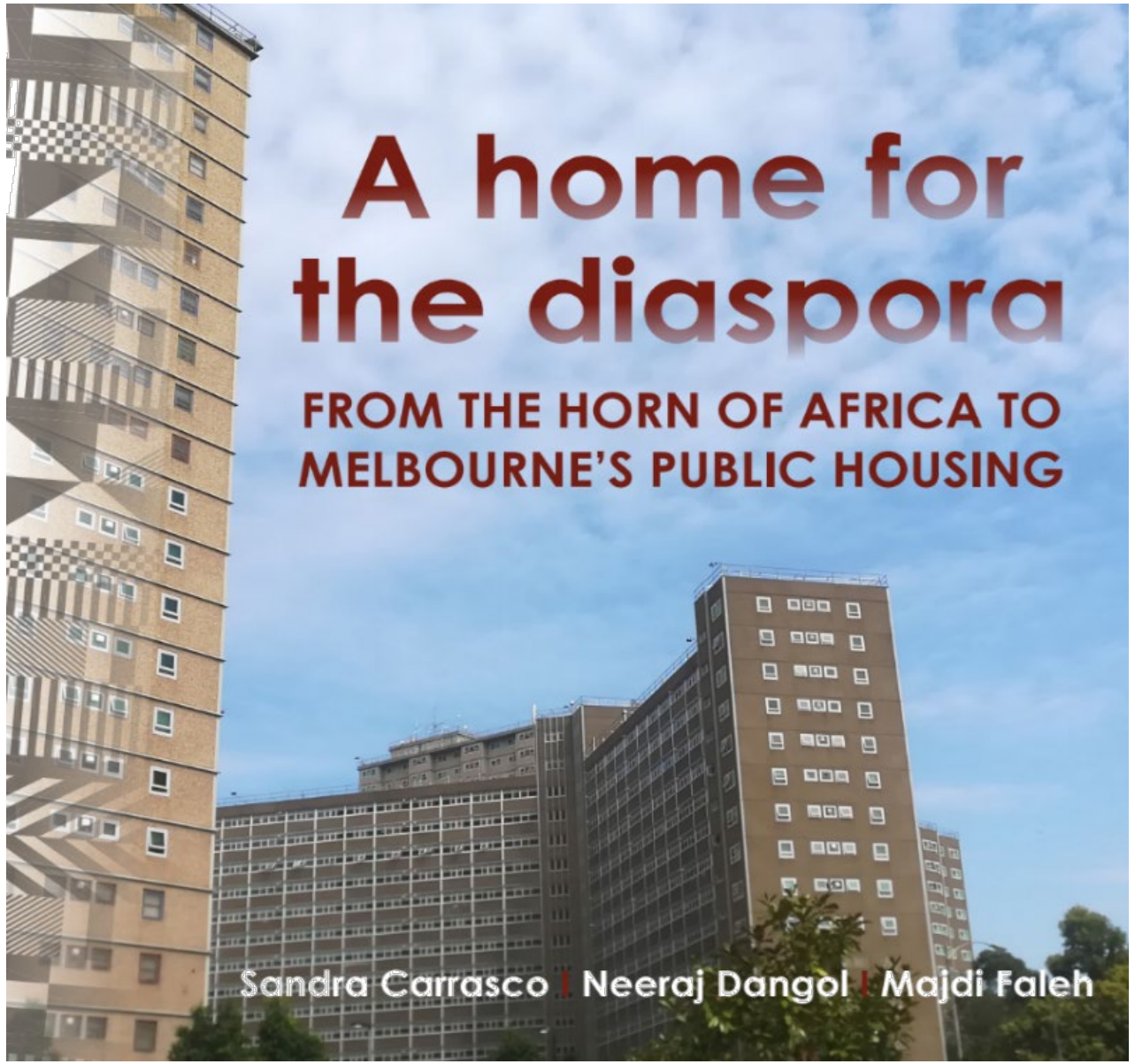

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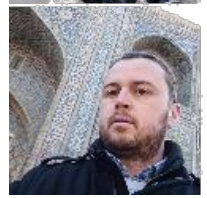

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AFFORDABLE HOUSING HALLMARK

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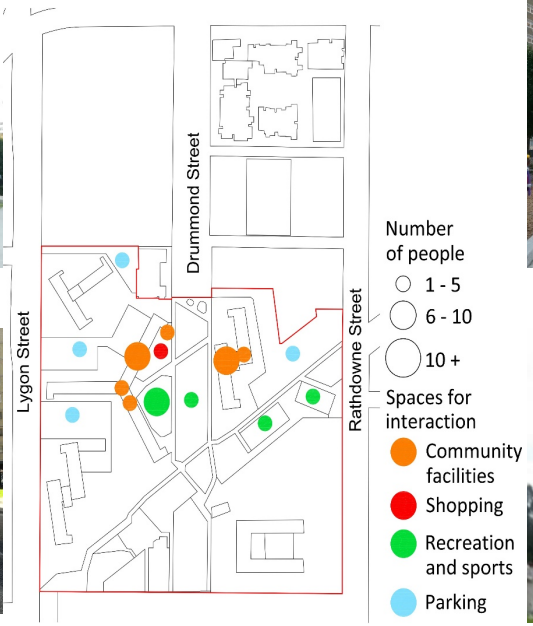
Social and Spatial interactions

Playground

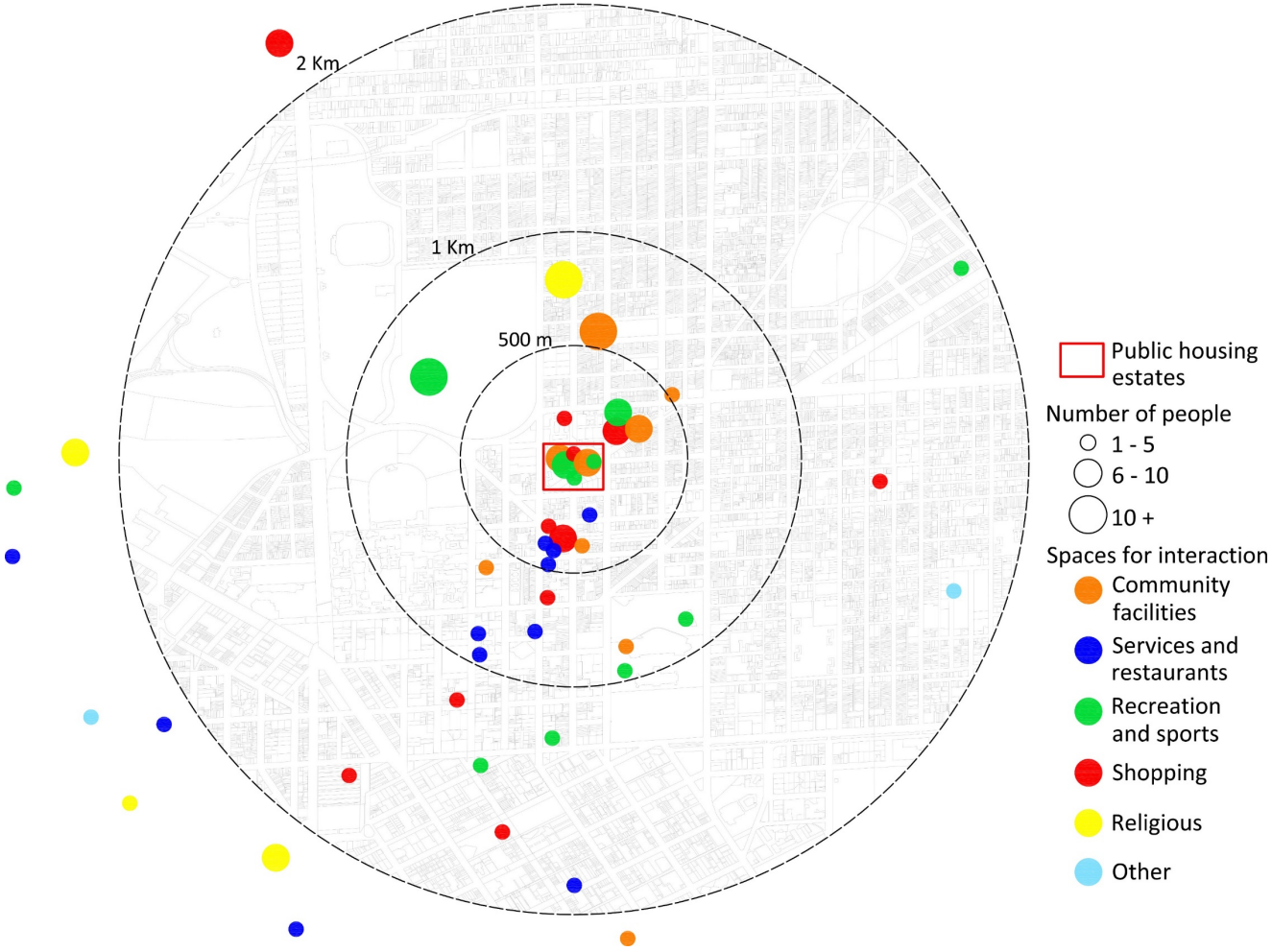
Weekly community market



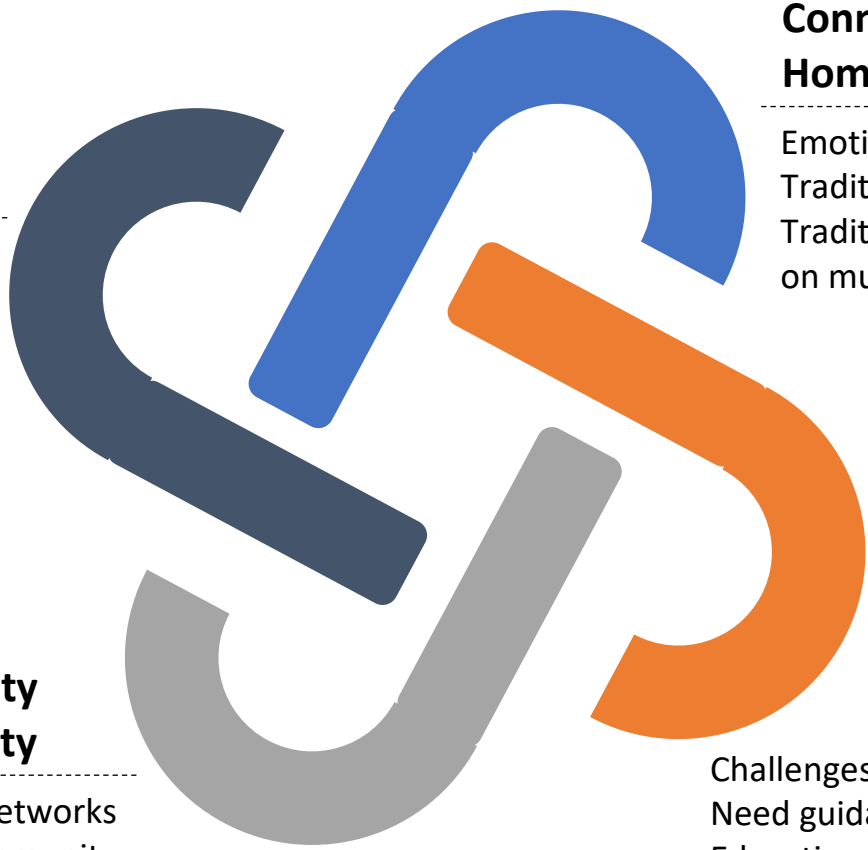
Spatial interaction inside the public housing estates

Park

Community gathering in Eid



A common & shared ground



Transition to Australia

Extended times in refugee camps and families separated, dreaming of reuniting, dealing with the socio-cultural changes, finding accommodation.

Connections to the Homeland

Emotional connections
Traditional values and lifestyles
Traditional structures of community solidarity based on mutual care

Community and Identity

Solidarity and mutual support, social networks
A strong sense of attachment to culture and community
Sense of integration in the community

Creating Home in Public Housing

Challenges in Melbourne's public housing towers for the community.
Need guidance and support to achieve economic independence
Education to improve their living conditions and escape the trap of living in public housing.

Source:
https://www.theaustralian.com.au/breaking-news/police-pounce-on-car-outside-flemington-complex-as-nine-melbourne-public-housing-buildings-locked-down/news-story/a92f9ac0e813fd62d87bf5c1979c4641
https://www.sbs.com.au/news/melbourne-public-housing-residents-demand-eased-restrictions-removal-of-police-amid-lockdown-confusion
https://www.sbs.com.au/news/ham-fisted-lockdown-of-nine-melbourne-public-housing-towers-some-without-confirmed-covid-19-cases-criticised

What happened and why?

3,000 people residing in nine public housing towers were placed under the harshest coronavirus lockdown in Australia.

Melbourne's public housing towers have 'explosive potential' for coronavirus to spread.

- High-density towers can be like 'vertical cruise ships'
- Tenants are likely to work public-facing essential jobs
- There was also concern about background health status

Source: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-07-06/why-melbourne-locked-down-public-towers-are-a-coronavirus-worry/12423934

Government response

- The Victorian Government did not have a pre-existing plan to manage an outbreak of COVID-19 in high density state-managed public housing.
- Engagement by government departments with community leaders and community organisations was deficient.

Parliament of Victoria, 2021

- Prior to the July outbreak, DHHS had not prepared a specific Outbreak Management Plan for the Melbourne's high-density public housing.
- Public servants and qualified interpreters needed to be sourced on short notice.
- Copies of the Detention Directions were not distributed when the lockdown commenced.

Victorian Ombudsman, 2020

- Confusion and a lack of communication.
- People felt scared, powerless and criminalised. No consideration of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Methodology

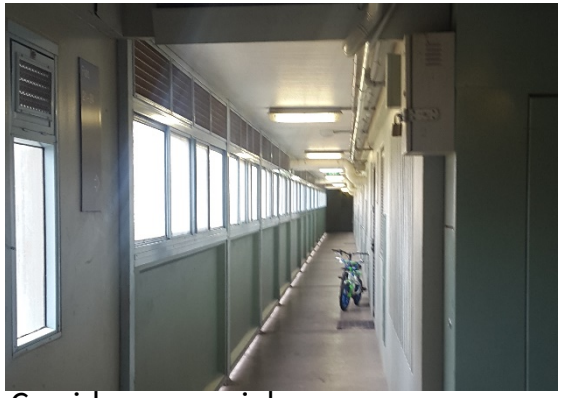
Nine semi-structured interviews conducted with Key Informants conducted between March and April 2021:

- Community leaders
- Advocates
- Non-profit organisations
- Religious organisations
- Community based organisations
- Police community liaison

Social networks for disaster prevention and response

Floor waiting space

Laundry areas



Corridors as social spaces

Storage

Health concierges

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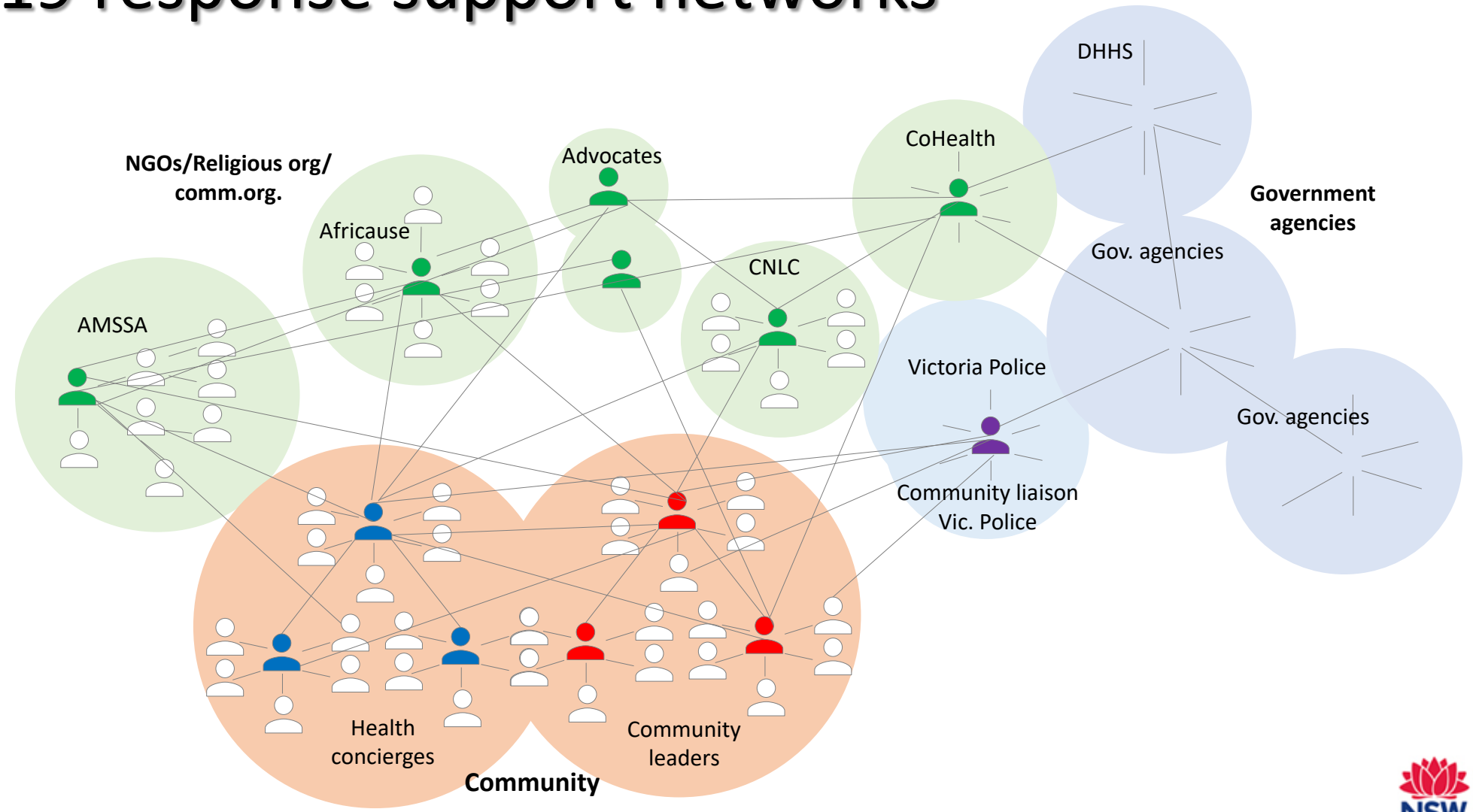
COVID19 response support networks



Lessons learnt

1. Local leadership for community engagement

   "…as an artist I use my skills to show what is my culture to the rest of the society. I have a group in the community, mostly women"

2. Cultural diversity VS cohesion

   "we don't have a leadership that is the main problem, where diversity we have common interest in here Australia we should work together so the missing link is lack of working together."

3. Long-term community engagement is the key

   "…without the concierges I am sure there would not have been possible to build trust [in the community]"

Carlton public housing volunteers help with door-to-door COVID-19 testing.

Lessons learnt

4. Community solidarity and youth engagement for communication and trust

   "I also observed the importance of involving the youth, they influenced their older family members, but they families were also proud of seeing their children working."

5. Continuity and scalability for sustainability and resilience

   "I have observed that people here are facing traumas that now they are hiding because they are busy, but I believe that at one point all this will emerge, and mental health support will be needed for the parents but also for the children."

   "co-designing or co-leading can translate into involving members of the community, not in a tokenistic way , not to just come and tick the box after you have taken the decision, it is really to come and say this is available. What do you need?"

Culturally diverse communities sharing a common ground

Lessons learnt

Institutional coordination and people-centred approaches are crucial to strengthen the institutional and community capacities to ensure better response and recovery which in the end would also prepare them for potential future disastrous events.

Thank you

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