

Communicating to CALD communities about energy

Best practice engagement
to connect with digitally
excluded groups



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School Of Media And Communication, RMIT University

Authors

Dr Xiufang (Leah) Li

Dr David Micallef

Associate Professor Diana Bossio

Associate Professor Lukas Parker

Francisca Diaz De Valdes Bakovic

School of Media and Communication, RMIT University

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Acknowledgement of country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University. RMIT respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waterways across Australia where we conduct our business.

Executive summary

This research examines the critical challenges facing culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Australia as they navigate the country's transition to clean energy. With CALD communities comprising nearly a quarter of Australia's population, there is growing concern that the shift toward digital communication and complex energy market information is leaving these communities, particularly newly arrived migrants and older people, behind in the energy transition.

To understand this challenge, a literature review and interviews with participants from Victorian multicultural and ethnic community groups were conducted to:

1. Engage with CALD community organisations to understand foundational knowledge gaps that are impacting how CALD communities engage with residential energy supply in Australia.
2. Understand the information access needs of newly arrived migrants and older CALD communities
3. Identify examples of how to engage these communities in communications with emphasis on non-digital formats around complex issues in energy markets.

Literature review

The literature review explored existing research on energy literacy among CALD communities in Australia, research within the Australian energy sector and international research relevant to the research objectives.

Key findings:

- **Energy literacy gap:** CALD communities, despite comprising nearly a quarter of Australia's population, are identified as most in need of energy literacy support due to significant inequalities in understanding and engaging with energy services, which threatens to leave them behind in Australia's transition to net zero.
- **Language and digital barriers:** Limited English proficiency in multilingual households creates difficulties in interpreting energy bills and accessing services. The rapid digitisation of energy services further disadvantages CALD customers, particularly elderly individuals who face both language and digital literacy challenges.
- **Industry communication breakdowns:** Energy companies often provide inadequate multilingual support, with poor translations of technical terms and cultural expressions, while overwhelming CALD households with overly complex and technical information.
- **Inclusive communication design:** Best practice requires developing alternative non-digital channels, using plain English with professional translations, and employing diverse communication strategies that match community preferences, from ethnic radio for older customers to social media for younger audiences.
- **Community-led approach:** Trusted intermediaries, such as community leaders, peers, and religious figures, are essential for effective energy literacy programs. Successful initiatives involve bilingual educators, in-person workshops, and empowering CALD leaders as energy experts to rebuild trust and bridge cultural barriers in the energy market.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with participants from identified priority language groups: Arabic (n = 4), Chinese (Mandarin) (n = 3), Indian (Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil) (n = 4), and Vietnamese (n = 3), with the remaining from organisations representing multicultural and multi-ethnic communities more generally (n = 6). The findings from their interviews are summarised below, with further detail and language-specific findings included in the full report.

Limited understanding of energy concepts

Findings reveal interconnected challenges that significantly impact energy decision-making. High energy prices and rising cost of living are primary concerns affecting daily energy use decisions, particularly for seniors. Most new arrivals remain unfamiliar with Australia's privatised energy market, often staying with default providers due to expectations shaped by their home countries' government-centralised energy systems.

Clean energy transition presents additional complexities. Seniors show less interest than new migrant families, with communities expressing concerns about implementation costs and lack of in-language information. There is a notable gender dimension to energy transition, where women participate more in sustainable activities but show greater resistance to changes, with the impact on cooking a primary concern across all language groups.

Barriers for community members experiencing vulnerability

CALD community members experiencing vulnerability face multiple intersecting barriers when engaging with the energy market, including digital exclusion among seniors combined with language barriers and poor accessibility standards in billing and communications. These are further exacerbated by culturally inappropriate support when dealing with energy retailer customer service teams, who often fail to inform customers about available hardship programs and financial assistance or push digitally excluded community members to online systems.

These challenges are compounded by gender disparities, with women often experiencing greater language barriers. Family gender dynamics in some communities often result in women having a less active role in decisions related to energy supply. Communities identified widespread concerns about energy-related scams that cause community members already experiencing vulnerability, particularly seniors, to avoid answering calls, creating an additional layer of exclusion from information and support.

Preferred communication and engagement approach

The findings highlight that culturally sensitive communication with CALD communities requires a focus on face-to-face interaction and community-centred approaches, supported by plain English and professional translation services. Effective communication leverages in-language ethnic media such as SBS radio and ethnic press, which have high engagement, particularly among older community members, alongside community-specific social networks that vary by cultural group.

The most trusted and effective engagement occurs through established networks, including peers, community and religious leaders, and in natural gathering places like places of worship, libraries, schools, and recreation centres. Train-the-trainer methodologies and family-friendly events with food have proven particularly successful for building trust and ensuring meaningful engagement.

Final insights

Based on the literature review and the interview findings, six overall insights have been developed to drive future communication and engagement to CALD communities. Further opportunities, as well as an overview of identified communication examples, are provided in the full report.

Insight 1: A foundational knowledge gap impacts interaction with the Australian energy market

CALD communities, particularly new migrants, lack an understanding of how Australia's privatised energy market works or has ingrained preconceptions about energy reliability, which impact the choices that they make when it comes to energy. Targeted education in CALD communities can help raise the level of foundational knowledge within these communities.

Insight 2: Intersecting barriers create compounded disadvantage

Multiple barriers work together to exclude CALD communities, including language barriers, digital exclusion and poor accessibility. Decreasing levels of trust due to energy scams are further increasing exclusion. Increased direct engagement, cultural awareness training, and the use of trusted networks with simple, translated resources can support increased overall engagement.

Insight 3: Cultural and gender dimensions significantly impact energy engagement

Cultural and gender factors impact the way that CALD families engage with the energy market. It impacts usage and energy type preference, as well as perceptions of different energy types (such as gas being more reliable and better for cooking). Whole family engagement, the use of workshops, including workshops related to food, can support families in engaging with energy information and dispel myths.

Insight 4: Trusted networks and face-to-face communication are essential

CALD communities prefer receiving information through trusted intermediaries, such as community leaders, ethnic media, religious figures, and peers, rather than government sources. Face-to-face communication that enables immediate interaction consistently outperforms digital channels for building trust and understanding.

Insight 5: Energy transition narrative needs to be simple, practical and relatable

The energy market can be complex, even in one's own language and energy transition language can add a further level of complexity. To gain traction, energy-saving, sustainability, and energy transition concepts need to demonstrate cultural and practical relevance rather than relying on abstract environmental messaging.

Insight 6: Affordability and cost of living shape decision-making

High energy prices and broader cost-of-living pressures drive conservative use, limit switching and dampen interest in clean energy alternatives. Communication to CALD communities, especially consumers experiencing vulnerability, should focus on addressing cost first, before environmental benefits.

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Introduction

The background of the page is a vibrant, abstract composition. It features a large, rounded rectangular shape in a bright red-orange hue, which resembles a speech bubble or a stylized window. This shape is set against a darker, textured background of deep reds and purples. In the lower-left corner, there is a semi-circular cutout revealing a lighter, blueish-purple area. The overall aesthetic is modern and digital, with a focus on warm, energetic colors.

Background and research question

Australian energy consumers are increasingly urged to consider the transition to clean energy. Government organisations and energy suppliers provide a wealth of mostly digital and online information about reducing energy costs and contributing to a more sustainable energy supply. However, recent research has shown that culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities risk being left behind as information about energy markets and energy initiatives moves online (VCOSS, 2024). In CALD communities, newly arrived migrants and older people are particularly vulnerable in navigating the complexity of a transitioning energy market.

Research conducted by AusNet about CALD communities has also identified that newly arrived migrants are excluded from key foundational knowledge about

the provision of energy services within an Australian context, which may limit their ability to interact with the energy market. This lack of knowledge may also place these groups at a disadvantage when undertaking energy (and cost) saving measures, and/or understanding how to deal with network outages.

Based upon the above context, the goal of this project is two-fold. It focuses on understanding the informational needs of older members of CALD communities and newly-arrived migrants to address “foundation knowledge” gaps related to residential energy supply in an Australian context. It also aims to gain insight into practices being used to engage with digitally excluded CALD communities to ensure that communication reaches those communities who are not online.

Our research objectives

- Engage with CALD community organisations to understand foundational knowledge gaps that are impacting how CALD communities engage with residential energy supply in Australia.
- Understand the information access needs of newly arrived migrants and older CALD communities
- Identify examples of how to engage these communities in communications with emphasis on non-digital format around complex issues in energy markets.

Methodology

This project involved two main components.

First, a comprehensive review of academic and grey literature was conducted to understand best practices for communicating with CALD community members experiencing vulnerability. This included narrowing down the number of CALD communities in which to focus primary research.

In stage two, participants from Victorian multicultural and ethnic community organisations, including multi-ethnic and faith organisations, clubs, women's associations, seniors' groups, individual ethnic associations and federations, and other relevant culture

and services groups were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews.

A total of 20 participants were recruited, representing communities from identified priority language groups: Arabic (n = 4), Chinese (Mandarin) (n = 3), Indian (Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil) (n = 4), and Vietnamese (n = 3), with the remaining from organisations representing multicultural and multi-ethnic communities more generally (n = 6). Fifty per cent of the participants identified as female (n = 10) and the remainder as male (n = 10). A profile of interview participants is included in the Appendix.



Literature review

This literature review explores existing research and studies on energy literacy among CALD communities in Australia. It also examines international research on energy supply, domestic research within the Australian energy sector, including previous studies conducted by AusNet.

Key findings

- **Energy literacy gap:** CALD communities, despite comprising nearly a quarter of Australia's population, are identified as most in need of energy literacy support due to significant inequalities in understanding and engaging with energy services, which threatens to leave them behind in Australia's transition to net zero.
- **Language and digital barriers:** Limited English proficiency in multilingual households creates difficulties in interpreting energy bills and accessing services, while the rapid digitisation of energy services further disadvantages CALD customers, particularly elderly individuals who face both language and digital literacy challenges.
- **Industry communication breakdowns:** Energy companies provide inadequate multilingual support with poor translations of technical terms and cultural expressions, while overwhelming CALD households with complex and overly technical information.
- **Inclusive communication design:** Best practice requires developing alternative non-digital channels, using plain English with professional translations, and employing diverse communication strategies that match community preferences, from ethnic radio for older customers to social media for younger audiences.
- **Community-led approach:** Trusted intermediaries such as community leaders, peers, and religious figures are essential for effective energy literacy programs, with successful initiatives involving bilingual educators, in-person workshops, and empowering CALD leaders as energy experts to rebuild trust and bridge cultural barriers in the energy market.

Review

CALD language groups and energy literacy

Energy literacy is critical for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. For CALD communities, it plays a crucial role in helping them make informed decisions. Energy literacy at an individual level is often conceptualised to capture four aspects: Understanding of energy concepts; knowledge of different energy sources and resources; awareness of energy development and usage; and comprehension of the impact of energy on the environment/society (Lee, Nguyen, and Sung 2022). As defined by Building Australia's Energy Literacy (Hogan et al. 2019, 54), an energy literate person has "the appropriate level of knowledge which empowers them to make informed rational energy decisions and actions which have a positive outcome for the individual, and ultimately, society at large." Beyond personal benefits, these individuals can become educational agents within their social circles, potentially amplifying energy conservation efforts throughout the community (DeWaters and Powers vv2011).

Lee, Nguyen and Sung (2022) further define four aspects of energy literacy. They are defined in Table 1. Aspects of Energy Literacy.

Table 1. Aspects of Energy Literacy

Energy Literacy	Explanation
Understanding of energy concepts	Definition of energy, units of energy and power, and energy transformation
Knowledge of different energy sources and resources	Identifying primary/secondary energy sources and renewable/non-renewable energy resources
Awareness of energy development and usage	The use of energy in societies and households
Comprehension of the impact of energy on the environment/ society	Understanding the impact that energy resource development and use can have on the environment and society

However, existing research lacks investigation into energy literacy among CALD communities in Australia, identifying them as the most in need of support. Despite making up nearly a quarter of Australia's population (ABS 2021), these communities face challenges navigating Australia's complex energy market, resulting in significant inequalities in their ability to understand, engage with and benefit from the energy services (Hogan et al. 2019; ECCNSW 2020b; ECA and SCF 2024). The impact extends beyond individual consumers, effectively leaving these communities behind in Australia's broader energy transition to net zero.

Barriers to energy literacy

Language barriers

Language is an important structural barrier for CALD energy customers. According to the 2021 Cultural Diversity: Census (ABS 2021) 15.1% of the 5.8 million people who speak another language at home speak English not well or not at all. Limited English proficiency impacts CALD consumers' experiences at different levels, particularly older individuals who do not have strong verbal and/ or written English literacy (Nicholls and Dahlgren 2021). They face difficulties interpreting their energy bills, accessing other energy-related information, including energy efficiency solutions and consumer energy resources, and meaningfully engaging with energy retailers (ECA and SCF 2024). According to the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), households struggling with language barriers have a significantly higher chance (59.8%) of failing to obtain energy concessions (Anderson 2024). Although older migrants in Victoria and NSW from Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese-speaking communities are aware of payment assistance programs, they rarely use them (Lakemba et al. 2016). Re-

search confirms that these communities lack crucial knowledge about energy services, including tariff options, retailer offers and metering systems (Lakemba et al. 2016).

For elderly CALD customers, limited English proficiency creates difficulties when contacting customer services by phone, a problem exacerbated by an inadequate interpretation system (Nicholls and Dahlgren 2021). Research in Victoria found major shortcomings in these services, including frequently unavailable phone lines and a lack of staff trained in energy matters (Nicholls and Dahlgren 2021). Reports recommend that energy companies ensure communications are accessible in the language of the customer by offering interpreter services and employing multilingual staff with energy expertise (Anderson 2024; ECA and SCF 2024; Nicholls and Dahlgren 2021). According to the VCOSS, in order to implement effective solutions, retailers must collaborate with CALD communities and local support to develop customised, place-based solutions for customers experiencing vulnerable situations (Anderson 2024).

Digital Literacy

Research shows that the rapid digitisation of energy services creates significant disadvantages for CALD customers experiencing vulnerability. As retailers increasingly rely on apps and live chats, existing inequalities are exacerbated, particularly when considering factors like limited English proficiency, digital literacy, access to adequate digital devices and internet connectivity (ECA 2023; Nicholls and Dahlgren 2021). Elderly CALD customers face the most significant impact, creating an intergenerational divide (ECA 2023; Nicholls and Dahlgren 2021). UK research on energy digitisation confirms that marginalised groups risk further exclusion due to poorly designed digital platforms combined with insufficient support, and limited regulation (Balta-Ozkana et al. 2025). In Victoria, Australia, digital exclusion prevents equitable access to essential resources, including energy provider websites, digital billing systems, and the Victorian Energy Compare website (Anderson 2024).

Poor industry engagement

Another barrier for CALD customers is the poor level of communication engagement from the energy industry. Engagement materials included in bills, websites, and letters often lack multilingual options (Anderson 2024; Gordon, Badejo, and Harada 2023; AEF 2022). Retailers also translate materials assuming that all members of a given linguistic community are proficient in that language (ECA and SCF 2024; ECCNSW 2020b) while direct translations of language and cultural expressions create further confusion for CALD customers (LOTE 2024a; ECA and SCF 2024). This is the case, for example, of phrases including "outage tracker", "connecting communities" and "power prepared", which do not translate easily (LOTE 2024a, 8). Acronyms like "EMMA" and English expressions like "working around the clock", often lack equivalent translations in CALD

communities' languages (LOTE 2024a, 8).

Research also indicates that CALD households feel overwhelmed and confused by the technical nature, busy visual presentation and complexity of the information available. Information overload (23%) and perceived complexity (22%) included in bills, factsheets and websites have been identified as the leading barriers preventing CALD communities' effective engagement with energy material (AEF 2022). The Australian Energy Foundation (2022, 14-15) refers to this problem as a "market failure", noting an urgent need for accessible energy advice. There is a critical call for culturally sensitive materials that address the priorities, concerns, values and unique needs of CALD customers.

Best practice communication in CALD communities

Research recommends the development of additional support mechanisms and alternative non-digital communication channels for customers facing digital exclusion (ECA 2023; Nicholls and Dahlgren 2021). Studies emphasise the creation of inclusive digital services through community co-design processes that incorporate feedback to ensure equitable services and access (Balta-Ozkana et al. 2025). Best practice also includes translating websites into multiple languages while working with NAATI-certified interpreters to develop specialised dictionaries of technical terms (ECCNSW 2020a). Understanding how these communities actually interact with digital services is critical to making meaningful improvements (Balta-Ozkana et al. 2025).

Plain English

Research on best practice suggests that engagement material would benefit from the use of plain English and/or in-language content that avoids technical language (e.g., “wires live”) (LOTE 2024a, 8) and translates specific terms using infographics (ECCNSW 2020a). Further, reports recommend focusing on high-

impact languages-Mandarin, Punjabi, Vietnamese, and Arabic-while making critical information clear and actionable for target audiences (LOTE 2024a; ECCNSW 2020a). Energy providers should implement proactive language support services across all contact points, especially on websites and bills (Anderson 2024).

Diverse communication strategies

The literature further indicates that CALD households prefer more diverse communication styles than non-CALD consumers. CALD community leaders, including those from Arabic and Chinese and Vietnamese-speaking communities, claim that their members strongly prefer simple, verbal, in-person communication over written materials (Sydney Alliance n.d.). Short videos are also identified as potentially effective tools (Sydney Alliance n.d.). Regarding distribution channels, research suggests that older CALD customers favour including TV, ethnic radio and face-to-face engagement, while young members prefer social media platforms like TikTok (ECCNSW 2020b; LOTE 2024b). Existing research, however, appears to overlook gender-based differences in communication engagement preferences and the potential influence of cultural domestic power dynamics on energy knowledge.

Use of trusted intermediaries

Trusted intermediaries from CALD communities play a key role in improving energy literacy in Australia. CALD customers prefer to receive important information in-language from familiar, trusted sources including peers, community members, and religious leaders (Sydney Alliance n.d.; ECCNSW 2020a). Indeed, literature on best practice by the ECCNSW (2020a) highlights that engagement strategies, where in-person energy workshops conducted in partnership with multicultural service providers and community leaders have resulted in positive outcomes for both retailers and CALD customers. Some of the successful case studies mentioned in the research including several key elements: targeting adults aged 18-65, involving bilingual educators to provide energy-related information included approaching technical concepts, energy saving and efficiency advice in CALD community languages, organising field trips, and providing supporting translated materials (ECCNSW 2020a).

them as energy experts within their respective communities. Pilot programs show that these community leaders, when provided with adequate support and resources, effectively improve energy literacy and engagement (Sydney Alliance n.d.). This community-led approach addresses both the cultural barriers and the confidence gap that prevent many CALD consumers from fully participating in the energy market.

Research also highlights the urgent need to involve CALD community members as decision-makers in the development of information materials (ECCNSW 2020b; Anderson 2024). This can help rebuild confidence with retailers while simultaneously improving energy literacy levels. This strategy is particularly important given that in general, CALD communities report a fundamental lack of trust in the energy market ecosystem resulting from barriers to engagement with industry stakeholders (AEF 2022; LOTE 2024c).

Further studies show significant benefits when energy companies partner with CALD leaders and empower



Interview findings

Findings from interviews with participants from CALD organisations are presented on the following pages. The interviews focused on three key areas of enquiry:

- Understanding of energy concepts
- Barriers for community members experiencing vulnerability; and
- Best practice communication and engagement

Under each key area of enquiry, the overall findings that are common across each language group are presented. This is followed by relevant findings and quotes related to individual communities.

Understanding of energy concepts

Common findings regarding the understanding of energy concepts, such as energy supply and energy transition across all CALD communities, reveal interconnected challenges that significantly impact energy decision-making.

Cost of living

A consistent concern across all CALD communities relates to high energy prices combined with the rising cost of living, affecting daily decisions about energy use. Seniors are the most affected demographic. Additionally, energy supply decision-making intersects with multiple barriers, including language barriers, digital literacy issues, and a lack of knowledge about accessing information. This particularly affects elderly people who experience digital exclusion.

Unfamiliarity with Australian energy market

Most new arrivals are unfamiliar with the Australian energy market, significantly impacting their ability to switch between retailers and often leaving them with default providers that may not offer competitive rates or services. This unfamiliarity intersects with their home countries' energy systems, which in many cases are government-centralised, creating different expectations about market structure, energy operations, and consumer choices.

Clean energy transition issues

Unlike new migrant families, seniors show less interest in clean energy. At the same time, some communities express concerns about implementation costs and a lack of information available in their languages about energy transition initiatives. The findings suggest there is no clear understanding of what energy transition involves. There is a notable gender element related to energy transition, with women participating more in sustainable activities while also generally showing the most resistance to change, especially to switching from gas to induction cooking practices.

Further examples of these challenges in relation to the four priority language groups are shown below.

Findings specific to Arabic-speaking communities

Understanding the energy market when English is not a first language is an issue in Arabic-speaking communities

Participant 3

"Maybe I do not understand the Australian energy market in more detail, although I do my research. I know many things, but maybe there are still many things hidden that I'm not aware of. You still have this feeling that, yeah, I know, but maybe I don't know anything. You might be well educated—I'm educated in this field—but you'll find out that there's still more to know, you see."

Participant 4

"Related to energy supply offers, there are many challenges. First, language barriers. Second, digital literacy issues. Third, maybe they don't know they can get the information, or where to find it—basically, a lack of knowledge on how to access and obtain information."

A lack of trust often compounds this lack of understanding, and concerns that changes could end up costing more

Participant 4

“When talking about changing companies, you don’t know where to go. What is the best company? You don’t trust anyone anymore, because you go with this company and they say, ‘We have the best offer and everything.’ And then someone else from another company calls you and says, ‘We offer you this and that,’ and you don’t know how to make up your mind anymore—who to trust.”

Participant 3

“When the government introduced solar programs, I agreed and installed them, but later I found out that you need to do maintenance, which costs extra every year..... At that time, we didn’t have enough explanation about what would happen in the future.....Similarly, now this is happening with batteries. The government has incentive programs for installing batteries, but I’m afraid I’ll end up in the same situation, apart from wondering how much it’s going to cost to maintain batteries.”

In communicating energy transition, however, understanding gender roles is important, as this often sees a split between who makes decisions about energy transition and who is impacted by the transition

Participant 2

“Women don’t have any voice in energy matters because of strong gender cultural traditions, but they are essential for energy transition. In fact, there is no interest from women in clean energy. For example, I was recently talking to a woman. She’s Egyptian, also from my own community, and lives in Hume. She was talking about how her cooking habits changed after her husband got solar and an induction cooktop. He signed up for all those environmental energy programmes, and she was talking from the perspective of cooking with all those kinds of new changes at home.”

Misconceptions about electricity supply in Australia, based on their experiences in the Middle East, as well as problems with translation, can also impact the communication

Participant 2

“...there are a lot of misconceptions around using electricity or electrifying your home in Australia because this (power cuts) happens a lot in the Middle East. In the Middle East, you can have the power off for hours and hours, and you’re not able to use anything that depends on electricity. While here in Australia, this rarely happens...”

Participant 2

“The term ‘energy transition’ doesn’t have any direct translation in Arabic. There is a need to unpack terms, making them clearer. I would never mention ‘energy transition’ because this immediately makes them feel like they’re blocked.”

Findings specific to Chinese (Mandarin-speaking) communities

Cost of living is an issue for new migrants to the Chinese community

Participant 18

“They don’t have enough money because inflation is higher than what they get from Centrelink.... They do activities there to keep their bills low. They use the community services available to them to charge their phones, to do the things that they don’t have to pay for.”

This is coupled with a lack of understanding of Australia’s energy market

Participant 7

“When talking about energy gaps, I would say that people migrated from China don’t understand different countries’ systems—that here you can actually change your energy provider. In our home country, it’s always the National Grid company issuing you your bill, while in Australia, it is privatised, and you have a choice of different power suppliers and different energy plans.”

Older members of the community, while they might not have as many financial constraints, have an information gap that limits their engagement with the market

Participant 5

“They wouldn’t know about changing providers unless someone tells them. But generally, they don’t worry too much about changing providers because, I think, that’s also partially because of the language barrier (...) It affects them because they can’t ask questions about how the system works.”

Participant 7

“Older migrants in their fifties and sixties who might be financially capable of installing solar panels and battery storage to help cut their energy bills, but they might face language barriers and other barriers like not understanding the Australian energy market, not understanding the choice of energy providers, and how that could impact their energy bills.”

Other evidence showed that some older people are apathetic about energy transition

Participant 5

“I don’t normally get seniors asking about energy transition.”

Participant 18

“They don’t care, to be honest. Elderly people, anyone over 60, have no clue about these things. There’s probably one in every 100 people I’ve met who specifically asks for green energy because it has an extra cost. They just want to keep their expenses as low as possible....”

A specific culturally linked issue is that cooking practices are adhered to and often work against attitudinal change in the transition away from gas

Participant 7

“I will say gas cooking is something Chinese migrants love. And women cook more generally. If they do stir fry, they think gas cooking might create more flavour. It’s more natural, and it’s not pretty easy for us to educate them why it is important to upgrade to induction cooktops. You know, sometimes people just want to stick to what they used to have.”

Findings specific to Indian (Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil-speaking) communities

Cost of living is a major concern for the Indian communities

Participant 8

“Because of the high cost of living and high energy prices, older people go to their community libraries. They will sit there the whole day because the heating is on in winter, the air conditioning is on in summer.”

Participant 8

“Affordability and reliability, that’s the two things we’re looking at in short. I think everyone’s looking at cost, even I’m looking at cost.”

For members of the community living in regional and rural areas, reliability is a concern as impacts to power supply cut them off from communicating with other members of their community

Participant 8

“Technically, energy should be something that by default should be there 24/7. Sadly, in a lot of regional areas and rural Victoria, where migrant communities are working, for example, they say that energy supply is not reliable. It goes off very often, and because electricity goes off often, the internet goes off too. So, when they don’t have electricity, they don’t have internet, and they’re not able to communicate.”

In communicating energy transition, the impact on cooking is a consideration in Indian communities

Participant 9

“Punjabis would talk about changing from gas to induction and say: ‘No, you cannot make a chapati puff up on an electric griddle. I need the gas burner to make proper puffed chapatis.’ I literally know Indian families—from the north, south, east, and west—who have electric appliances in the house but have installed LPG gas stoves in their garages and do most of their cooking there because they need that gas flame.”

Participant 9

“There are many questions about gas…… Will gas still be around? From an Indian perspective, I’m sure someone from an Indian background would say you cannot cook a good dosa on an electric hotplate.”

Some of the communication about energy transition is not reaching these communities because of language or translation issues

Participant 11

“There is a large portion of the community who understand what climate change is, what kind of problem we’re in, and that there is urgency and we need to act. There is another large portion of the community who are oblivious to this and have no idea what any of this means. One of the reasons is usually that these conversations are held in English, so they somehow can’t connect with it because is not explained in our language, Punjabi. It seems like a textbook conversation or something that isn’t a real-life issue to them.”

Participant 11

“For example, Punjabi people might say ‘electricity’ instead of ‘energy.’ So if somebody keeps saying ‘energy, energy, energy,’ they might wonder, ‘What are you talking about? Energy of my body? Energy drink?’ That’s the gap.”

Findings specific to Vietnamese-speaking communities

The cost of energy is a significant concern for both seniors and new migrants in Vietnamese communities

Participant 12

“In winter, the elderly need to turn on the heater, but the cost to pay the electricity bills is very high. And you know that? When you go to a lot of elderly people’s houses, you can feel the cold. The same in summer—they’re not willing to turn the air conditioning on because of the cost.”

Participant 13

“I think for overseas students, the price of energy could be a concern. They are concerned about the price and living costs being expensive, and currently, because it’s not easy to find a job right now in this market, energy bills would be a burden for them.”

For new migrants, the cost is compounded by a lack of understanding of the Australian energy market

Participant 12

“Because of language barriers, isolation, and lack of connections, when they arrive, they are not aware of the Australian services available to them. They don’t know the system here, including the option to change from one energy retailer to another because in Vietnam, the energy market is managed by the government. So, they don’t know they can seek support if they have a problem. A lot of new arrivals are very surprised when I talk about the services that they may have—the services that are available for them.”

Community organisations engage with new migrants in the Vietnamese community about energy issues and transition to clean energy

Participant 12

“We got the mother groups, a playgroup where young mothers come representing their families, and we talk to them about energy issues and transition. After, they come back to talk to their families to share what they have learned.”

Concerns about the impact of energy transition on cooking, however, are also shared in Vietnamese communities

Participant 13

“I can share what my wife says about this. She’s the person who cooks at home. She doesn’t want to have induction because the heat isn’t strong enough compared to gas, so she prefers using gas. But one of the things that she loves about induction is the cleaning. Yeah, it’s very easy to clean the stove, so when our friends come to our house, she always repeats that it is ‘very very easy to clean’. If induction products could provide more heat, they would very likely meet her expectations. We’re not attached to the taste of food (as Indians might be, for example) or cultural preferences. We don’t have strong feelings about flames being good – we just say that induction isn’t strong enough right now.”

Barriers for community members experiencing vulnerability

Digital exclusion and language barriers

Community members experiencing vulnerability face multiple intersecting barriers when engaging with the energy market. Digital exclusion, particularly among seniors, combines with existing language barriers and the absence of accessibility standards (e.g., appropriate font sizes and line spacing in bills, and the predominant use of online billing), creating significant issues with accessing essential information and services. These overlapping challenges make it difficult for CALD community members to navigate the complex energy market effectively.

Digital exclusion, combined with existing language barriers and the absence of accessibility standards, creates significant issues with accessing essential energy information and services.

Lack of energy market support

The situation is further exacerbated by inadequate support from energy retailer customer service teams, who lack training in culturally responsive communication approaches when working with CALD communities, especially older adults, and sometimes fail to inform customers about available hardship programs. Digital and language barriers also prevent CALD community members from accessing critical support services, including energy concessions, financial assistance programs, and hardship schemes. This systemic exclusion leaves households experiencing vulnerability without access to potentially life-changing financial relief.

Gender issues add complexity

A gender dimension adds another layer of complexity: across all community groups except Punjabi communities, women experience more language barriers in their own languages and English, creating additional obstacles to accessing energy market information and support services.

Scams create an additional layer of exclusion for members already experiencing vulnerability

Across all communities, participants identified that community members, especially seniors, are highly concerned about falling victim to scams. Whilst a high awareness of scams is positive, participants suggested that this is causing community members who are already experiencing vulnerability, to further exclude themselves from communication (such as not answering calls), and potentially missing information that may support them.

Findings specific to Arabic-speaking communities

Language and literacy were highlighted as barriers for first-generation migrants in Arabic-speaking communities

Participant 3

“They don’t know the language. They don’t know anything about the system or how it works. They don’t know about energy programs, energy funds, or energy assistance. So sometimes they’re facing situations where they don’t know what’s happening. You need to educate them and keep them updated about what’s going on.”

Participant 4

“For first-generation migrants, they don’t even know how to read—they’re illiterate in their own language. And you want to ask them to open the computer? Maybe they don’t know how to turn it on, log in, and start searching. They can’t even read their own language, less in English. How can they learn? When people get older, they don’t have the cognitive capacity like before to learn things, and they forget things. You teach them and they forget. The digital is a big issue.”

For women, language and literacy can also be compounded with other barriers – like isolation

Participant 2

“Women are at high risk and experience a lot of barriers when accessing energy programmes because women are mostly isolated in this community. First, it is a huge language barrier because they don’t know English, there are also a lot of issues like family violence that play an important role in this. So mostly you find many women in the Arabic-speaking community who come to Australia are quite isolated and they’re not allowed to socialise, not allowed to, you know, to study something or to work.”

Concerns were also raised about sales tactics used by organisations

Participant 4

“You have those other organisations who keep calling you and telling you, ‘We did the comparison between your bill, and we found that this provider is better, and this one gives you better rates.’ So, you start receiving those phone calls, and you don’t even have time to compare for yourself... And imagine if you don’t speak English and you have someone calling you, keep calling you. How do you get rid of them? And with migrants, we find it’s not polite, you know, to hang up on people. You know, it’s not nice to do that to people. They keep calling. They don’t give up.”

Digital exclusion sees senior members of the community miss out on financial support and incentives

Participant 20

“We’ve had cases where mainly older people don’t have an email address and don’t have the ability to use computers for accessing the internet. So, applying for rebates or even understanding what’s on offer there? Impossible. There is a real barrier there.”

Participant 20

“There are all these financial supports out there, like rebates and things, but the online access barriers, especially for CALD older people with language barriers, is an issue for people.”

These barriers are made worse at times by energy retailers, who either do not effectively communicate offers, or push senior customers to go online when they call

Participant 4

“Related to seniors, and this thing about digital, sometimes when they call customer service, they tell you: ‘Log in and check this, check that, receive your bill by email.’ You call them to solve an issue, and they keep telling you, ‘You can do it online, log in and follow up.’ It’s hard. They don’t get it. You need one-on-one personal service. You know, you need to speak to someone, especially when English is your second language and you’re an older person. And sometimes you need an interpreter. And they keep telling you to go online, and sometimes they hang up on you while you’re waiting because they’re busy.”

Participant 20

“When I’ve given presentations, there are people who aren’t aware that there are things like the utility relief grant. I would say there are lower levels of awareness, and that’s essentially free money that people are entitled to if they meet the criteria—concession holders experiencing hardship that their retailer does need to assist them with. It’s sort of like this obscure thing that if you’re in the know, you’re in the know. I don’t think the energy companies are going out of their way to promote it.”

Fears of energy-related scams are pushing community members into further isolation as they sometimes miss out on relevant information because of a lack of trust

Participant 20

“What we heard is that people are scared about energy-related scams (social media ads, phone calls, door knocking), so they don’t know which companies are legitimate. There are also pressure tactics from retailers. In this regard, the council is important because the programme serves as a bridge to connect people with suppliers to learn about Victorian energy upgrades, discounts and other rebates. This affects especially older people and people with language barriers.”

Participant 2

“I talk to them about how one way to avoid scams is to come directly to Council and ask about these services, because we can provide them and we have trusted service providers, and we look after them. The Council comes between the client or the community member and the service, so it is trusted.”

Findings specific to Chinese (Mandarin-speaking) communities

Participants from Chinese communities had concerns specifically for senior members due to either digital exclusion

Participant 6

“My concern is that most of our members are very elderly, and some of them don’t know how to use laptops or iPhones. Some of them don’t know how to access the Internet, and nowadays most information is released online.”

Or language issues

Participant 5

“I guess a lot of elderly people are having difficulties using some of the benefits like energy concessions or programs that the government provides. So, I guess that’s primarily language-based issues because the forms to apply for subsidies are definitely not in their language. So, for people who don’t know English or don’t have very good English, they will sometimes come to us to seek assistance with the forms. However, we receive very few requests to help them fill out forms to submit to the department.”

Energy retailers don’t make it easy for older members of the community to access their information

Participant 7

“Have you seen some of the go look up a bill? You know how small the lettering is? There’s half a page that’s blank. I’ve seen energy bills that are in 10 pt font. Do you understand? 10 points! I have glasses and I need at least a 12 pt font or larger. So, I have to lean in to look at it. Do you think an elderly person can look at that? No. They don’t have the ability to do this. I’ve seen somebody print their bills on A3 paper—they go to Officeworks to buy A3 paper and go home and print it in a big size. They gave me a bill this big because this is the only way they can read it. They (retailers) make it very complex.”

Findings specific to Indian (Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil-speaking) communities

Newer Indian communities often miss out on critical service information due to language barriers

Participant 8

“Sometimes they don’t even know when it’s a planned outage because they’ve received an SMS in English. They haven’t really bothered to read the message because they just think ‘oh, it’s something from sales at Ausnet,’ but they don’t realise that it’s important to understand the message because tomorrow for some hours there’s going to be no electricity in their house.”

They also miss out on essential hardship and financial assistance, through a lack of awareness

Participant 8

“All providers offer hardship assistance, but many CALD communities don’t even know that something like that exists—that they can call someone and ask for help. So, it’s sad, and they don’t pay the bill. They don’t know that they can call the provider and ask for assistance and that somebody will guide them.”

Participant 9

“Generally, people who come straight off the plane, like students or new migrants, normally don’t have any social support. They have just landed and have signed their first rentals; they are the most vulnerable because they don’t have the knowledge about the system here.”

Seniors, who may know some English, still have difficulty understanding the complex language of the energy market

Participant 8

“I have friends who are not bad in English, but when they have to discuss their energy plan and how much they are paying and what they could save, their English is not that good. Sometimes they call to customer service, and they have to ask to the staff ‘please speak slowly’ because staff explain things too quickly that seniors don’t understand... They assume that because the client may speak English, they understand everything. But that’s not always the case. Sometimes, seniors will say ‘yes’ because of the pressure they feel. But did they really understand?”

Participant 10

“I don’t think education plays a part here. No, because Indian people who come here are reasonably well-educated and have knowledge of English, but the terminology used is not easily understood until you understand what the terminology means. So, for example, in solar energy, you have fees and tariffs, and you have certain conditions—only the first 8 kilowatts we will pay money for. And then there is something

called... in a normal energy tariff, you have peak and off-peak. If you have a gas heater, you have a night off-peak, something like that. I would say some clarity is required. There is some consistency and uniformity with all the energy retailers; that's not a problem, but the understanding of those terminologies is a problem. So, if, let's say, you take a local Anglo-Saxon population who've been born and brought up here, they tend to understand because they've lived their lives here. But when you apply the same terminologies to a migrant who's not come from a similar market condition, for them that's a challenge."

Scams have also made members of this community wary of interactions with organisations they do not know

Participant 8

"So now most of the migrant communities just don't take a call if they don't know who is calling because of scams. They don't answer if they don't know the caller, but then sometimes the doctor is calling or the hospital is calling for an appointment, and they miss that too because, you know, they just don't answer. They've been told don't take the call if you don't know the number."

Participant 11

"People are aware that they can change providers, but there is a good amount of scam(ming) also. Like, we keep getting the scam calls that (say) 'if you choose this provider, it will be cheaper,' and blah, blah, blah. And then people ignore them."

Participant 10

"Nowadays with all the phone calls, people aren't trusting because there are a lot of scam calls coming in. So, people don't believe anyone calling, and that's pretty much it."

Findings specific to Vietnamese-speaking communities

Both language and digital literacy issues impact new migrants and seniors in Vietnamese communities

Participant 12

"New arrivals lack information and are struggling financially as well. When they are not settled yet, they have a lot of difficulties. They do not have a chance to get updated or to get the information, like what is available in Australia or who can help them."

Participant 13

"The big concern is the language barrier, especially for elderly people, because providers' information is mostly in English and elderly don't know how to use technology either."

For older Vietnamese women, language issues can be more pronounced than for men

Participant 12

“The first generation of Vietnamese came here by boat. They were refugees living for a long time in refugee camps. A lot of them are working-class people without much education in Vietnam, who worked hard in factories when they arrived to work to raise the family and they didn’t have a chance to come back to university or come back to school, with no time to learn English until their 30s. As men worked outside the house, they learned more English than women, who cared for their children in their home, with no time to go out into society to make friends.”

Energy organisations often make it difficult for non-English speaking customers to engage with their services

Participant 13

“When you call a provider, the initial communication is in English. So, how can we start a conversation? How can they say ‘OK, I need a translator in my language now?’ So, they use the community health to help them with a call or to ask a friend. But the best thing a new migrant could do is to talk to us to call the company on the client’s behalf.”

Scams have also made community members more wary of the energy sector

Participant 12

“Calling the elderly to advertise energy-saving products makes our elderly feel very annoyed and scared of being scammed. We don’t know if they are scammers or not. They just keep calling day and night. I know they’re doing their business, but it’s really annoying and scary.”

Participant 13

“They prefer face-to-face communication because there are a lot of scams on the phone right now. So, if they see a strange number, they won’t pick it up.”

Preferred communication and engagement approach

The findings highlight the critical importance of cultural sensitivity when communicating with CALD community groups. Across communities, face-to-face communication and community-centred channels are the preferred communication and engagement approaches for building trust and ensuring meaningful engagement.

Face-to-face communication and community-centred channels are the preferred communication and engagement approaches for building trust and ensuring meaningful engagement.

The use of plain English is strongly recommended to improve accessibility

Professional translation services (as opposed to automated tools like Google Translate) are essential for translating engagement materials into the specific languages of CALD communities, ensuring customers can access accurate information. Supporting this approach, participants highlight that retailers must invest in training their translation staff. Furthermore, participants refer to the advantages of providing phone-based interpreter services with specific contact numbers incorporated into bills.

Leveraging community leaders and meeting places

CALD communities typically seek information through established trust networks, including peers, community and religious leaders, as well as community centres or organisations. Word-of-mouth communication and social media serve as the primary mechanisms for information sharing within these community networks. Community organisations have found success using “train the trainer” methodologies that build local capacity and create interactive, sustainable information networks. The most effective and trusted engagement with communities is where people naturally gather, like places of worship, libraries, schools, and recreation centres. Family-friendly events with food have proven particularly effective for meaningful community engagement.

Using ethnic media and social media

Participants highlighted that in-language media remains a popular source of communication to CALD communities. SBS radio and ethnic press are seen as a connection point of the community and have high engagement, especially by older members of CALD communities. In addition, community-specific social networks are important for the community to share information. These networks can differ by community, and some examples are highlighted in the community-specific findings below.

Participant 19

“It’s not about getting lots and lots of pages of translated material and dumping it on a website and sending a link. I think having information, whether it’s on a website or in other forms, is helpful, but keeping it simple and clear with a contact point or liaison point is key.”

Information specific to Arabic-speaking communities

Trusted organisations and members of the community, and in-language media channels, are key to reaching Arabic-speaking communities

Participant 2

“They wouldn’t trust the government, so they would mostly look for experiences from other peers in the same community. Word of mouth also plays an important role here, so no one will think that they would open, you know, the website of the government and check information right away. No, they don’t prefer to do this. They would prefer to ask neighbours or family members or friends who speak the same language, and share the same culture. These are the messages that are mostly trusted.”

Participant 2

“I think one of the most trusted places would be the schools where the children go. Local schools are very important in spreading these messages to parents, or maybe they have posters or flyers. Local mosques

and libraries are also trusted. There is always a social board in libraries where there are posters and flyers about different programmes in languages. Women usually go there for story time, and they check those boards, and they see what's relevant to them, and they can ask for—you know, if you have flyers for this or that—and take them home to show their husband if they think it's interesting.”

Participant 4

“No one watches TV anymore like before. I think if you go to language radios like SBS—every community, if they're not very well settled in Australia, they would listen to their own radio station that speaks in their own language. So this is number one for information. If you talk about it, you get someone to interview this person in—let's say Arabic language—someone speaking about it in Arabic, people are listening. They're learning. They share the information.”

Community-led social media channels are also key sources of information distribution

Participant 2

“Social media platforms, including WhatsApp groups, Facebook groups, and Instagram, play a key role in spreading messages within this community. When they want information, they immediately ask friends, family, and people who speak the same language and share the same culture.”

Communication, however, needs to be simple, clear and relevant

Participant 2

“The use of examples is key when talking about terms like energy transition. For instance, if I want to explain energy transition, I would start by asking questions first. Like: ‘How many of you are homeowners? How many of you use gas cooktops? How many of you use a lot of electricity for air conditioning?’ All those kinds of questions to get their interest, and then with their answers, I start to say: ‘How about you have programmes that would benefit you, would be healthier, would give you so many financial benefits in the long run?’ And then they start getting interested and they ask questions, and this is how we unpack it.”

Participant 2

“Having a screen with a lot of slides and a lot of information—boring information—they don't want this. They want to speak to someone. They want someone face-to-face.”

Community engagement sessions can be effective in delivering information and helping communities overcome misconceptions about energy transition

Participant 2

“We have some programs on sustainability where we highlight the importance of a greener future for their children. We also focus on the financial benefits. For example, we explain that when you transition to electrification, you pay much less on your energy bill. I use this in my messaging as well, and it usually works. We also host family-friendly workshops where all the family can come, with children’s activities like face painting, and we provide food catering. Wherever there is food, people will come and have a chat or listen to the information.”

Participant 2

“In (council) libraries, we provide induction cooktops, and community members who live in the area can borrow them and use them for free for about two weeks. After trying them, they love them. We also do cooking demonstrations with induction cooktops in our Zero Waste workshops in our libraries. A lot of the women from the Arabic-speaking community, when they see us cooking using the induction cooktops and try them, they really like them and they appreciate the benefits.”

Information specific to Chinese (Mandarin-speaking) communities

Chinese communities value face-to-face communication

Participant 7

“When talking about communicating with this community, I would say that face-to-face communication is important. Going into those communities and having conversations—you know, going to community groups—that will make a big difference. The use of engagement materials in Mandarin is important too.”

And keeping information simple

Participant 5

“Keeping information simple is important. I previously saw pretty good examples of communicating information—they had information packs where each had 3 lines, accompanied by pictures and very simple sentences, just like the Australian Electoral Commission. I think they set a pretty good example. Then try not to use translation mechanisms. I mean, Google Translate is good, but it lacks the flavour, fluency, or logic. Some of the information comes out very weird, not exactly the same as the English version, and they simplified it. I guess that’s a hard balance to strike because you want to be simple, but you want to give out the full information.”

Some community organisations will help organisations get information out to their community, such as in this example

Participant 6

“We have a very large WeChat group with a few thousand people. So, if someone wants to send us information, we translate it and share it on WeChat for everyone. There are a lot of Chinese workers in the community group—researchers, psychologists, allied health professionals, community organisation liaison officers. If someone doesn’t know how to use it, they probably have sons or daughters, and their children can help tell them the information.”

Information specific to Indian (Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil-speaking) communities

Indian language publications and social media channels are effective ways to reach Indian communities

Participant 9

“Punjabi radio stations would work with the Punjabi community. There are a couple of Punjabi newspapers and other Indian publications like Indian Voice. People will, just for nostalgia or other reasons, still read these Indian publications more, or listen to Indian radio more than they would listen to mainstream radio, so the message will get across quicker if you use these channels.”

Participant 8

“We find YouTube is really good. There are less words, less language, less English, but more action is easier to understand. For example, we got a Punjabi-speaking comedian to help Punjabis manage electricity consumption during peak and off-peak periods. He created a song-like video saying ‘oh, don’t touch your washing machine at this time or your bill increases’ and he showed it as an atom bomb. Then he said ‘oh, use it at this time for lower costs.’ Everyone in the community watched and discussed the video and went home checking when they used appliances, and their bills went down.”

Training community leaders and advocates can support the dissemination of information

Participant 8

“When you’re talking about clean energy policies, for example, we use what’s called “train the trainer.” You train a few people in that community, then they become the advocates who go out and inform others about what’s available, what the costs are, and how they can save—both the environment and their energy bills.”

As can engagement activities in spaces where the community congregates

Participant 8

“In different faith centres like the Muslim mosque, the Sikh gurdwaras, and the Buddhist temple, for example, people who have good knowledge of energy plans are running sessions for seniors who are not familiar with English and

digital technology. So on Saturday mornings, they explain everything about your provider, where you need to go and check if there is a better plan, if you have a health care card. Everyone comes. And when we expect 100 people, we have 300 in the faith centre hall. It is really necessary because everyone wants to try and save, but they want to know how they can do it when they don't have digital literacy and English literacy."

Information specific to Vietnamese-speaking communities

Social media is a key information source for Vietnamese communities

Participant 13

"I think the majority of our community, get information from social media in Vietnamese language. We have SBS Vietnamese radio. They have their Facebook and they have thousands of followers and they update information there. So it's a true social media channel in language."

Participant 14

"A lot of people receive information about energy in Vietnamese through Facebook. For example, they follow government publications in Vietnamese about energy savings and communicate with other Facebook groups like 'Vietnamese in Melbourne' to share information."

As are trusted community groups

Participant 12

"We (a Vietnamese association) have got the trust from the communities, so what we are saying, they believe is true. We've become a trusted source of information. And in return for that, when we accept invitations to partner with organizations, we are really careful in choosing partnerships. We're careful with the information that we are sharing."

And family and friend networks

Participant 13

"My wife is a person who cooks at home. She doesn't want to have induction because the heat's not strong enough like gas, so she prefers using gas. But one of the things that she loves about induction is the cleaning. Yeah, it's very easy to clean the stove, so when our friends come to our house, she always repeats that it is 'very, very easy to clean'."

Participant 12

"We Vietnamese people are very open—we accept change. So I'm using gas cooking now, but my daughter, who's an architect, said to me, 'Mum, you have to change to induction cooktops soon.' So I told her that's OK, as soon as you show me how to do it."



Final insights

The findings reveal a limited understanding of energy concepts related to energy supply and energy transition, language and digital barriers, with preferred communication and engagement approaches centring on face-to-face communication and using community-centred channels, among the priority CALD language groups – Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), Indian (Gujarati, Punjabi and Tamil) and Vietnamese.

The findings further reveal that these challenges facing the CALD communities are primarily due to the following factors:

- Varying use of different terminology across cultural contexts
- A lack of cultural relevance in translating some concepts, such as the absence of the concept of ‘energy transition’ in some languages
- Difficulty in finding trustworthy sources and navigating the local energy market
- Cultural traditions (e.g. cooking and gender roles) impact energy choices in the home

Below, final insights based on the findings have been summarised.

Insight 1

Foundational knowledge gap impacts interaction with the Australian energy market

CALD communities, particularly new migrants, lack an understanding of how Australia's privatised energy market works. Many come from countries with government-centralised energy systems and don't realise they can choose retailers or switch plans, often remaining with default providers. Others have ingrained pre-conceptions about energy reliability, which impact the choices that they make when it comes to energy

Opportunity

Targeted education in CALD communities, which takes into account some of the other barriers to accessing information as detailed further, can help in raising the level of foundational knowledge in CALD communities.

This could include:

- Educational workshops with migrant resources centres
- Support services in conjunction with CALD community groups support community members to review their energy use and understand how to manage their interaction with the market.

Insight 2

Intersecting barriers create compounded disadvantage

Multiple barriers work together to exclude CALD communities: language barriers combine with digital exclusion, which intersects with poor accessibility design (small fonts, online-only billing) and inadequate customer service training, creating systemic disadvantage.

The increase and prominence of scams within the energy market are further increasing this disadvantage, with many avoiding interactions with organisations they do not know, potentially missing out on services that can support them.

Opportunity

- Increased direct interaction with CALD community groups experiencing or at risk of vulnerability.
- Maintaining some print resources, in language and accessible design, distributed through trusted networks.
- Cultural awareness training for staff or special access support lines for disadvantaged groups, such as seniors.
- Strengths based communication (rather than deficit based 'vulnerable' focus) helps community members feel that they have a stake in the communication aim.

Insight 3

Cultural and gender dimensions significantly impact energy engagement

There are cultural factors that impact how families from different CALD communities interact with the energy market. This can be seen in their usage and energy type preference, such as the perception that gas cooking is better for cooking. A gender dimension plays a significant role in access to information and the decision-making process.

For example, in some communities, women face additional barriers due to isolation and less language proficiency in English and their own language. In some communities, despite being more interested in sustainability practices and having a larger level of engagement with community services, they are not the decision-makers when it comes to energy choice.

Opportunity

- Interaction with some CALD communities, may benefit from communication and engagement activities that engage the whole family, not individuals.
- Family workshops and information/education at community days may provide opportunities to reach the whole family, and address potential barriers.
- Food is an important part of cultural identity. Cooking workshops, or the use of prominent food figures within the community may help dispel some myths about energy transition.

Insight 4

Trusted networks and face-to-face communication are essential

CALD communities prefer receiving information through trusted intermediaries, such as community leaders, ethnic media, religious figures, and peers, rather than government sources. Face-to-face communication that enables immediate interaction consistently outperforms digital channels for building trust and understanding.

Opportunity

- Focus on training community leaders and support services to understand the energy market so that they can engage with their communities.
- Co-design and create resources with community leaders and communities, engaging with them in the distribution of these through their trusted networks.
- Support community organisations and migrant resource services to educate their communities. For example, a small targeted grant scheme to hold face-to-face education workshops.

Insight 5

Energy transition narrative needs to be simple, practical and relatable

The energy market can be complex, even in one's own language. Energy transition and sustainability add a level of complexity that causes further exclusion. In CALD communities, terms like "energy transition" have no direct translations, and technical concepts need to be unpacked using practical examples. To gain traction, energy-saving, sustainability, and energy transition concepts need to demonstrate cultural and practical relevance rather than relying on abstract environmental messaging.

Opportunity

- Co-design and test energy transition materials within CALD communities to ensure understanding.
- Focus on the practical application of energy transition concepts, rather than the concepts themselves. For example, rather than communicating about the environmental benefit of transitioning away from gas, focus on cost savings, practical cooking applications and the reliability of electricity in the Australian energy market.

Insight 6

Affordability and cost of living shape decision-making

High energy prices and broader cost-of-living pressures drive conservative use, limit switching and dampen interest in clean energy alternatives. Coupled with an unfamiliar market structure, barriers to information and multiple approaches from unknown organisations, this potentially sees community members who are experiencing vulnerability stick with what they know.

Opportunity

- Focus on cost savings as a primary message in addition to environmental benefits.
- Use trusted networks to engage community members, looking at direct engagements to educate communities on understanding the market, their ability to switch providers and financial support services / schemes.
- Use practical examples and in-community case studies to highlight cost savings.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

This project utilised a qualitative research method – semi-structured interviews – which enables researchers and organisations to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges CALD communities face in the energy market, as well as the communication strategies to engage these communities. However, it has several limitations. Firstly, owing to the lack of statistical significance, the results from the limited number of participants, who represent the four priority language groups, cannot be generalised to the overall populations of these communities. Secondly, this research relies on a single research method – semi-structured interviews – to collect data during a short period between July and August 2025, and adopts thematic analysis to analyse the interview data. Thirdly, the interview participants are multicultural leaders working at prominent Victorian CALD community organisations. Their opinions may not fully capture the perspective of everyday individuals within the communities they serve.

Future research that combines qualitative and quantitative research methods and conducts longitudinal studies over an extended period, guided by theoretical frameworks like energy justice and community engagement, especially from the perspective of everyday people, would provide researchers and practitioners with a holistic understanding. These approaches would offer guidance and solutions to effectively engage CALD communities in equitable energy supply, thereby facilitating the success of energy transition.



Communication and engagement activities: Community portfolio

Throughout interviews, participants were asked to share examples of communication that have engaged different parts of their community. The table collates these examples, aligned with the insights of this report.

It should be noted that many of the examples that participants provided were engagement activities, which highlights the preference in these communities for direct engagement to counter language and digital barriers.

Key insights	Opportunity	Examples in practice
1. Foundational knowledge gap impacts interaction with the Australian energy market	Targeted education in CALD communities, which takes into account some of the other barriers to accessing information as detailed further, can help in raising the level of foundational knowledge in CALD communities.	Mothers groups where discussions are held about energy issues and transition, with information to be shared for the family. School recycling program that engaged children with simple recycling education to reach parents .
2. Intersecting barriers create compounded disadvantage	Increased direct interaction with vulnerable groups. Strengths based communication (rather than deficit based 'vulnerable' focus) helps community members feel that they have a stake in the communication aim	Sessions for seniors that explain energy bills and how to change providers. Phone-based interpreter services incorporated into bills. Bi-lingual staff in energy organisations to support engagement
3. Cultural and gender dimensions significantly impact energy engagement	Customers' experiences may be shaped by intersections of gender, class, race, (dis)ability etc. These factors should be acknowledged in communication. Consider in-language communications for people from CALD backgrounds and employing more people from CALD communities in Australia in your organization.	Cooking with induction - library program to lend induction cooktops to community members to try. Culturally specific cooking workshops using induction cooktops. Family-friendly events with food to engage the whole family as an information / education activity.
4. Trusted networks and face to face communication are essential	CALD communities prefer receiving information through trusted intermediaries, such as community leaders, ethnic media, religious figures, and peers, rather than government sources. Co-design and create resources with community leaders and communities, engaging with them in the distribution of these through their trusted networks.	Train-the-trainer to build local capacity in organisations. Engagement activities at congregation points including places of worship, schools, libraries and recreation centres. Social media channels run by the community for the community like Facebook Groups, WhatsApp and WeChat. Community organisations partnering with energy organisations as a trusted source of information. Use council's existing service touchpoints to inform about energy assistance programs. Work with seniors clubs and seniors organisations to coordinate information dissemination. Recording of mobile phone messages from community leaders to distribute through their communities.
5. Energy transition needs to be simple, practical and relatable	To gain traction, energy-saving, sustainability, and energy transition concepts need to demonstrate cultural and practical relevance rather than relying on abstract environmental messaging.	Australian Electoral Commission information highlighted as best practice for translated materials that are being simple, clear and accompanied by imagery. YouTube song video with simple tips to help people understand off peak and peak electricity costs.
6. Affordability and cost of living dominate decisions	Focus on cost savings as a primary message in addition to environmental benefits.	Sustainability workshops that focus on financial benefits that show how moving to electricity instead of gas will save money.

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Appendix

Interview Participant Profile

Participants	Cultural or Language Group	Organisation Type	Role/Position	Gender
Participant 1	Arabic	Arabic community	Representative	M
Participant 2	Arabic	Inner City Local Council	Community Outreach Officer	F
Participant 3	Arabic	Community Group	Volunteer President	F
Participant 4	Arabic	Arabic community	Representative	F
Participant 5	Chinese -Mandarin	Chinese Community Services Organisation	Community services worker	M
Participant 6	Chinese -Mandarin	Chinese Peak Body	Director	M
Participant 7	Chinese -Mandarin	Environmental Organisation	Community Organiser	M
Participant 8	Indian - Gujarati	Faith-based Organisation	Representative	F
Participant 9	Indian - Punjabi	Community Organisation	Past President	M
Participant 10	Indian - Tamil	Indian Peak Body	Secretary	M
Participant 11	Indian - Punjabi	Multicultural Climate Organisation	Former Communications Manager	F
Participant 12	Vietnamese	Vietnamese Association	Community Engagement and Event Coordinator	F
Participant 13	Vietnamese	Art and Culture Organisation	Vice-president	M
Participant 14	Vietnamese	Art and Culture Organisation	Representative	M
Participant 15	Multi	Faith-based Community Organisation	Customer Service Adviser	F
Participant 16	Multi	Faith-based Community Organisation	Customer Service Adviser	F
Participant 17	Multi	State Government Department	Staff	F
Participant 18	Multi	State Government Department	Staff	M
Participant 19	Multi	Multicultural Organisation	Executive Director	M
Participant 20	Multi	Outer Suburban Local Council	Household Energy Officer	F

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School Of Media And Communication, RMIT University