

Chapter 1 – Overview

1.1 Introduction

This ACT Community Communication and Information Plan (CCIP) is a requirement of the *ACT Emergencies Act 2004* under section 149. It supplements the ACT Emergency Plan which describes the responsibilities, authorities and the mechanisms to prevent, or if they occur, manage emergencies and their consequences within the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), in accordance with the requirements of the [ACT Emergencies Act 2004](#).

The effective communication of public information and warnings is a critical element of emergency management, with the power to reduce potential loss of life and property. The CCIP reflects contemporary communication channels and the associated public expectation to have up to date and validated information.

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services must make a CCIP for communicating information to the community during an emergency. The ESA Commissioner must ensure that information about the CCIP is given to the community. The ESA Commissioner also has statutory responsibility for community education and awareness about emergencies and improving community preparedness for emergencies. The CCIP complements the role of the ESA Commissioner, and of Government agencies with legislative responsibility for ongoing community education and awareness about emergencies and the issuing of public information and warnings.

This CCIP may be activated outside an emergency if warranted.

1.2 Purpose

The purpose of the CCIP is to outline the arrangements for effective communication by the ACT Government with the public, stakeholders and the media, and the coordination of communication between the Lead Response Agency, the Public Information Coordination Centre (PICC) and relevant agencies/directorates during major emergencies and incidents.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of the CCIP are to:

- Establish the mechanisms across government to support the effective delivery of public information, in accordance with the role of lead agencies and the national warning frameworks.
- Identify the mechanisms to rapidly disseminate emergency information to the media and the public.
- Provide rapid and appropriate advice and instructions via media sources and agency websites including local media, social media, lead response agency websites and other appropriate ACT government channels so the ACT community can contribute to the protection of themselves and their neighbours.
- Establish credibility for information released by the ACT Government by ensuring it has undergone appropriate clearances and is relevant, consistent and accurate.
- Lead the continuous improvement of the ACT Government's public information response to emergencies.

1.4 Legislative Arrangements

The CCIP has been developed for the purposes of Section 147 and 149 of the *ACT Emergencies ACT 2004*.

The CCIP is a sub-plan of the ACT Emergency Plan. It operates in conjunction with agency specific emergency plans and the National Security Public Information Guidelines (NSPIG) in respect of a national terrorist situation.

The CCIP is to be reviewed no less frequently than once every five years unless there are changes requiring an update before that time.

1.5 Scope

Through this plan, the Commissioner designates to the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) responsibility for ensuring all necessary arrangements are in place for the delivery of coordinated, whole of government community communication and information in the event of an emergency, including the establishment of the PICC.

The Public Information Coordinator (PIC), designated as the Executive Group Manager Communications and Engagement in CMTEDD, is a member of Security and Emergency Management Senior Officials Group (SEMSOG).

The Chair of SEMSOG, ESA Commissioner, CPO, CHO, the Head of Service, Emergency Controller (if appointed) or Incident Controller can request the PIC to activate this plan and establish the PICC.

In the fulfillment of this role, CMTEDD will:

- Appoint a Public Information Coordinator (Executive Group Management Communications & Engagement) in accordance with 4.3.3 of the ACT Emergency Plan.
- Establish the Public Information Coordination Centre in accordance with 4.3.3 of the ACT Emergency Plan. The size and scale of the PICC will be determined by the PIC in consultation with the relevant authority and Lead Response Agency to reflect the nature of the emergency and meet any requirement for surge support from other directorates or agencies.

The CCIP recognises that operational public information is the responsibility of the Lead Response Agency. Operational public information is communication that occurs for the purposes of supporting the operational response to an incident or emergency. This would include the issuing of public warnings and calls to action aimed at minimising the risk to the public arising from an emergency (see section 2.3.1).

The CCIP details the coordination and release of public information during an emergency including:

- The provision of timely and accurate information and advice to the public and media.
- Ensuring distribution of information is appropriate to a broad range of audiences and stakeholders, including those with special requirements.
- Supporting the role of the Lead Response Agency in the delivery of operational warnings and public information.

The CCIP, through the PICC, also provides a mechanism for the Lead Response Agency to be informed of community concerns and feedback.

1.5.1 Principles

The following principles apply for public information management and communication:

- Public safety information and information intended to protect life and property is deemed top priority.
- Provide information and advice to the public in a timely manner, using the most appropriate channels.
- Ensure communication and engagement approaches recognise hard to reach audiences, the diverse needs of the community, accessibility and culturally and linguistically diverse requirements.
- Deliver communication activities in accordance with whole of government communication guidelines.
- Seek to provide consistent and coordinated information drawn from key stakeholders and/or agencies through the establishment of a single point of truth for the ACT Government. In the case of multiple or complex emergencies, there may be more than one single point of truth, in which case close coordination and cooperation is essential.
- Ensure pathways of communication within Government support timely and accurate collation, approval and dissemination of information.
- Provide and share accurate and reliable information across inter-agency communication channels and platforms to ensure consistent and validated information is distributed to the public.

Chapter 2 – Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Governance

The *ACT Emergency Plan* specifies the governance arrangements during a time of emergency.

The relationship of public information functions to other key functional areas with and without the appointment of an Emergency Controller is found at [Section 4.3.4 of the ACT Emergency Plan](#).

2.2 Leadership

The *ACT Emergency Plan* specifies the senior roles in place for emergency response in the ACT. Depending upon the nature of the emergency, these roles include an Emergency Controller, Management Executive and Lead Response Agency Controller. The Lead Response Agency for identified hazards is outlined in Annexure B of the *ACT Emergency Plan*.

The *ACT Emergency Plan* specifies the appointment of a PIC and defines the PIC as responsible for oversight of public and media information activities for emergencies in the ACT, including providing assistance to SEMSOG in advising Cabinet.

CMTEDD, as the Agency responsible for the CCIP, is responsible for the appointment of the PIC. The PIC should have experience in whole of government strategic communication and the ability to liaise with other senior government leaders.

The PIC will brief directly to either, the ESA Commissioner, CPO, CHO or the emergency controller (depending in the nature of the emergency) and will directly engage and coordinate with other roles as necessary. For example, through the coordinator general role or similar.

The PIC will appoint one or more Deputy PICs to help manage public information. This could include one Deputy PIC from the Lead Response Agency to manage operational public information and one Deputy PIC to manage whole of government coordination.

2.3 Whole of Government Coordination

The communication of clear, consistent and cohesive messages is of paramount importance in an emergency. This will be achieved by strong coordination of information across the ACT Government and it is the role of the PICC to prioritise information for dissemination.

In times of emergency the responsibility for coordination of public information to support the emergency response is shifted to the PIC and delivered through the PICC.

During the initial period of an emergency, all government and ministerial communication, other than that directly relevant to the incident or emergency should be suspended to ensure clear messages reach the community.

After the initial response, the PIC, in consultation with the relevant Lead Response Agency Controller or Emergency Controller, will resume whole of government communications about services and activities impacted by or supporting the emergency response. All non-operational emergency public information is to be disseminated by the PICC. All other government and ministerial communication remains suspended.

At a point in time agreed by the PIC and the Lead Agency Controller or Emergency Controller, broader government communications may recommence.

After that point:

- all agencies/directorates involved in an emergency response may release ‘agency specific information’ without reference to the PICC.
- Agencies/Directorates who are continuing to manage their day to day operations may also release ‘agency/activity specific information’ without reference to the PICC.

However, it is the responsibility of all involved agencies to ensure that the information they intend to release is not in conflict with messages being generated by the PICC. The overarching intention is to avoid being in conflict and to ensure agency specific information supports the direction of the Emergency Operation.

Table 1 summarises responsibilities for different types of communication during an emergency.

Table 1 – Communication responsibilities

This table references communication in the context of an activated PICC and should be read as such. It is the role of the PICC to prioritise information for dissemination across WHO G, noting that operational and policy decisions are made outside of the PICC.					
	Example of information	Executive GM Comms & Engagement, CMTEDD	PIC working through the PICC	Lead Response Agency Comms Manager	Other Government Agency Comms teams
Operational public information to support the IC in protecting life and property	Community warnings and calls to action		Secondary responsibility	Primary responsibility	
Non-operational public information to support the management of the emergency	Updates on impacts of an emergency, location of evacuation centres, non-urgent advice, Ministerial statements		Primary responsibility		
Non-operational public information and communication advice to SEMSOG	Communication approach and messaging	Primary responsibility	Secondary responsibility	Supporting role to the PIC	
Whole of Government internal communication about the emergency	Government key messages and talking points	Primary responsibility	Secondary responsibility		
Agency specific information to support the emergency	Public transport information or information for schools	Secondary responsibility	Secondary responsibility		Primary responsibility

	Example of information	Executive GM Comms & Engagement, CMTEDD	PIC working through the PICC	Lead Response Agency Comms Manager	Other Government Agency Comms teams
Direct engagement with impacted communities and landholders	Localised information with respect to emergency response e.g. road closures		Secondary responsibility	Primary responsibility	Secondary responsibility
Direct engagement with key stakeholders and peak bodies	Correspondence with businesses about trading restrictions	Secondary responsibility	Secondary responsibility	Primary responsibility	
Direct engagement with community leaders to reach specific target groups	Updated Information for aged care health providers		Secondary responsibility	Primary responsibility	

2.3.1 Approval of operational and non-operational public information

Information related to the operational emergency response, including alerts and warnings, for public dissemination must be approved by the Lead Response Agency Controller, Emergency Controller (if appointed), or their nominated delegate.

For ESA-lead emergency responses, alerts and warnings systems are managed by the Incident Management Team and are activated by the relevant Lead Agency Controller in line with the agency's protocols.

Although these operational communications may occur outside the PICC, the PIC will require visibility of all communications to enable the preparation and timely distribution of appropriate supporting communications and to ensure a seamless, coordinated communication response for the community.

Information relating to other critical government business impacted by the emergency but managed by other agencies or Directorates must be approved by the relevant Deputy-Director General and the PIC. A decision to disseminate this non-operational information will be made by the PIC based on the emergency situation and in consultation with the Lead Response Agency Controller or delegate where necessary.

2.3.2 Public Information Roles

The PIC and Deputy PIC roles are responsible for resourcing the PICC in accordance with the public information requirements of the emergency, drawing from staff within the Lead Response Agency and surging staff as necessary from across the ACT Government.

When determining the PICC resources, consideration should be given to:

- the nature of the emergency and related public information requirements (peaks and troughs or acute and sustained)
- the number, demographic, and geographic location of the public likely to be impacted by the emergency
- the accessibility of impacted communities to access information
- the expected duration of the PICC
- the resources and responsibilities of the Lead Response Agency.

Understanding these elements will allow resources (including people, information and communication channels) from across Government to be used to maximum efficiency.

In most circumstances, the following roles and their responsibilities are a minimum requirement to support the provision of information to the public during an emergency.

- Public Information Coordinator (PIC)
- Deputy Public Information Coordinator(s) (Deputy PIC)
- ECC Liaison Officer
- PICC Liaison Officer
- Media Liaison Officer
- Social Media Officer
- Website Officer
- Graphic Design Officer
- Access Canberra Liaison Officer
- WHOG Internal Communication Officer
- Ministerial Media Advisor Liaison
- Community Liaison Officer (CSD)

The PIC and Deputy PIC should appoint these officers and other roles as required to appropriately resource the PICC. In instances of extended or multiple emergencies, sub-teams may be established in the PICC.

Additional specialist resources may also be required such as TCCS liaison officers to assist with any interruption or planned changes to the transport system, additional community support liaison officers from CSD, a web team, digital production or campaign advertising. The PIC may also seek to establish working groups that extend beyond the immediate PICC to enhance coordination and draw on the resources of external agencies.

Table 2 Example structure of the PICC.

Public Information Coordinator (PIC)				
Public Information	Strategic Communication and Content	Whole of Government Communication and Engagement coordination	Campaigns and Advertising	ACTPS Internal Communication
Core PICC streams			Additional PICC streams as required for longer-term emergencies	

Chapter 3 – Operation of the Plan

3.1 Prevention and preparedness

3.1.1 Agency preparedness

ACT Government Directorates undertaking the role of Lead Response Agency or Supporting Agency must ensure appropriate capability and capacity exists within communication teams to respond to an emergency. This includes:

- Maintaining ongoing engagement and effective operational communication with local media.
- Establishing and maintaining appropriate communication channels to provide information to the public (such as social media channels).
- Establishing and maintaining appropriate internal communication channels to provide agency-specific briefings on community and media concerns and feedback.
- Providing emergency training and support for agency communication staff.
- Ensuring sufficient staff capacity to enable response to growing demand for information during an emergency, including providing staff to work in the PICC.

It is expected that Lead Response Agencies or Supporting Agencies have communication plans and associated standard operating procedures in place for a wide range of potential emergencies including:

- terrorist attack
- flood emergency
- storm emergency
- bushfire emergency
- urban fire
- chemical or hazardous emergency
- disease or epidemic emergency
- extreme heat (health, worksafe and energy grid implications)
- energy network emergency.

These plans should complement the Hazard Specific Sub Plans required by the *ACT Emergency Plan* and be tested as part of training and exercising as defined in 3.4.2 of the *ACT Emergency Plan*. CMTEDD and Lead Response Agency Communication teams should participate in these training exercises.

3.1.2 Community preparedness

Lead Response Agencies have primary responsibility for community education and awareness about emergencies and improving community preparedness for a wide range of hazards.

Community education and awareness programs should be consistent with the National Disaster Resilience Strategy and other relevant plans such as the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan.

3.1.3. Media preparedness

CMTEDD, in conjunction with the Lead Response Agencies, will maintain ongoing overarching relationships with local media to ensure an understanding of the operation of the PICC during an emergency. This includes:

- Establishing and maintaining Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with ACT media on emergency communication where appropriate.
- Maintaining up-to-date media contact lists and effective working relationships.
- Coordinating regular exercises and briefings with media representatives on emergency preparedness and response.

3.2 Operation of the PICC

3.2.1 Setting up the PICC

The PICC is maintained to support the functions of the PIC. The PICC will be activated at the discretion of the PIC in consultation with the Emergency Controller (if appointed) the Lead Response Agency Controller as identified in the ACT Emergency Plan, the Chair of Security and Emergency management Committee of Cabinet (SEMC) or Head of Service.

The scale and location of the PICC is determined by the PIC, in consultation with the relevant decision makers.

- Table 3 provides more information on the responsibility of the PICC and Lead Response Agency when an increased level of emergency communication is required.
- Table 4 provides information on potential locations of the PICC.

Depending on the scale of the emergency, the authorisation of information for release will be through the Lead Response Agency Response Controller, Emergency Controller (if appointed) or the PIC.

It is important that the PICC establish a positive and close working relationship with the Lead Response Agency communication team to draw on existing emergency communication plans and expert knowledge of the subject matter. This can be achieved through the role of the Onsite Liaison Officer and a Lead Response Agency Liaison Officer.

The PIC will advise SEMSOG, SEMC, the Communication Coordination Network (CCN), the CMTEDD Records Manager and Ministerial Media Advisors when the PICC is operational.

The PIC will determine, in consultation with the Lead Response Agency and other stakeholders, if all government communication should go through the PICC and advise government agencies accordingly.

3.2.2 Concurrent emergencies

In the instance where a second emergency is in place, the PIC, in collaboration with the Lead Response Agency Controllers, Emergency Controller and SEMSOG will provide guidance on the primary and secondary focus for communications.

The PIC will establish a second PICC, to coordinate communications on the new emergency. The size and scale of each PICC will be determined by whether it is supporting the primary or secondary emergency response.

The PIC will appoint one or more Deputy PICs to ensure the consistent and appropriate management of both operational public information and whole of government information coordination across both emergencies.

The PIC will act as the point of coordination on all communications and will liaise directly with the Lead Response Agency Controllers or the Emergency Controller on the prioritisation and dissemination of messaging.

Table 3 – PICC Activation (to be read in conjunction with Table 1)

Activation	Description	Role of the PICC	Role of the Lead Response Agency	Role of other Government Agencies
PICC activated as a precaution	Scaled activation to meet communication requirements in anticipation of a major incident. Until the incident is declared an emergency under the emergency framework, the PICC may operate without the support of the ECC.	PICC to move through steps of activation.	Embed Lead Response Agency representative(s) into the PICC (Deputy PIC and ECC Liaison Officer). Provide briefing and content support to PICC. Sharing and briefing on emergency communication plans. Support the Incident Controller (if established).	Provide resources to the PICC as required. Keep abreast of whole of government messaging and information.
PICC activated in response to an emergency	Unanticipated emergency. It is likely there will be lead time between notification of PICC activation and it being fully operational.	PICC to move through steps of activation	Responsibility for public information dissemination and Duty Media Officer until PICC is established. Transition of responsibility to the PICC. Support the Incident Controller (if established).	Consider agency role in distribution of information. Liaison with PICC if possible, role in distribution. Work at direction of the PIC on what requires approval through the PICC.
PICC fully operational during incident (short term incident)	Full activation for the duration of the incident.	All government messaging and information dissemination to support the operational emergency response.	Support to the IC for operational public information. Close liaison and coordination with PICC to ensure consistency of information.	
PICC fully operational during incident (medium to long term incident)	Full activation for the duration of the incident.	All government messaging and information dissemination to support the operational emergency response. PIC will advise when government communication no longer needs to be actioned through the PICC for approval and dissemination. For longer term incidents, PICC may establish working groups involving other agencies and stakeholders to support its work.	Support to the IC for operational public information. Close liaison and coordination with PICC to ensure consistency of information.	

PICC fully operational – more than one incident	Full activation for the duration of the incident.	PICC resourcing to reflect multiple incidents, working as sub-teams within the PICC. PICC responsibility for prioritisation of information dissemination in consultation with ECCs or Lead Response Agency Controllers. PIC will advise when government communication no longer needs to be actioned through the PICC for approval and dissemination. PICC may establish working groups involving other agencies and stakeholders to support its work.	Lead Response Agencies to take responsibility for agency specific messaging and information. Close liaison and coordination with PICC to ensure consistency of information.	
PICC transition from incident to recovery	Full activation for recovery from emergency.	All government messaging and information dissemination to support the operational emergency response. PIC will advise when government communication no longer needs to be actioned through the PICC for approval and dissemination.	Lead Response Agency is responsible for agency specific messaging and information. Close liaison and coordination with PICC to ensure consistency of information.	
PICC operational but scaling down	Scaled activation to meet communication requirements.	PICC physical location may be deactivated. PICC works closely with Lead Response and Support Agencies as required.	Transition of communication coordination and key messages to the Lead Response Agency communication team.	

Table 4 – PICC locations

ESA-led response	1	ACT Emergency Services Agency, ESA HQ, 9 Amberley Avenue, Fairbairn
Health-led response	3	Health Directorate, 4 Bowes Street, Woden
For any other responses	2	Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and Engagement, ACT Government Civic Office Block London Circuit, Civic

3.3 Information flow into the PICC

The PICC will receive and use information from a range of sources including ESA, ACT Policing, media and social media, websites and Access Canberra. The PICC will then process and verify relevant information and prepare a response. Once appropriate approval is gained the PICC will then release the information via appropriate channels.

3.3.1 Communication channels and platforms

The PICC has responsibility for determining appropriate channels and platforms for communication of public information. The PICC should seek to take advantage of existing communication channels and platforms of both the Lead Response Agency and the broader ACT Government.

The PICC, in consultation with the Lead Response Agency, will determine the most appropriate 'single source of truth'. This may be the website of the Lead Response Agency or CMTEDD, or some other appropriate public platform. Once identified it will be the responsibility of the PICC to ensure the information is current and provides a useful point of reference for the public and media.

For longer term emergencies, it may be necessary to undertake public communication campaigns informed by market research.

3.3.2 Realtime public warnings and messages

The Lead Response Agency has responsibility for issuing operational emergency warnings and in these instances the PICC will play a supporting role.

3.3.3 Communication coordination in a National Security Incident (Counter Terrorism)

Providing information to the community and the media in respect to a national security incident situation will be done in accordance with the National Security Public Information Guidelines (NSPIG).

3.3.4 Corporate services

Corporate Services in CMTEDD and the Lead Response Agency are responsible for the provision of work health and safety support to those working in the PICC. This may include liaison with the home-directorates of these staff to ensure employment conditions are met.

3.4 Recovery

The requirements and mechanisms for clear and effective public information as part of Community Recovery are identified in the *ACT Community Recovery Plan*.

The PIC will assume initial responsibility for coordination with the Lead Response Agency, the Community Recovery Coordinator and other relevant Agencies on ongoing recovery communication. The PICC will remain activated through the recovery phase at the discretion of the PIC and Recovery Coordinator.

3.4.1 Deactivation of the PICC

The decision to deactivate the PICC can be made by the Lead Response Agency Controller or Emergency Controller, the CPO, CHO or Head of Service in consultation with the PIC. There may be a period of transition when full resources are no longer required within the PICC and appropriate transition plans will be put in place via the PIC.

Once the PICC has ended, the PIC is responsible for coordinating a debrief and evaluation exercise to identify lessons learnt and areas for improvement or modification with respect to the operation

Chapter 4 – Maintaining the Plan

The Executive Group Manager, Communications and Engagement, CMTEDD, as the designated Public Information Coordinator on SEMSOG, is responsible for maintaining the CCIP on behalf of the Commissioner. This includes:

- Reviewing the CCIP no less frequently than every five years, unless there are changes requiring an update before then.
- Ensuring that senior communication officers are identified and trained to act as alternative to the PIC.
- Ensuring communication officers who may be called upon to work in the PICC are clearly identified and trained and work with agencies to build appropriate redundancy within their communication teams to meet the requirements of the PICC.
- Reviewing emergency communication plans and standard operating procedures of the Lead Response Agencies on a regular basis.
- Participating in training and exercises as defined in the ACT Emergency Plan.