Warning fundamentals

Speed read

- Public information is a term used by emergency management organisations to describe the types of information that are given to the public immediately before, during and after an emergency to reduce the potential impact of an emergency or hazard.
- Warnings are a specific form of public information that give point-in-time information about a hazard that is impacting or is expected to impact communities.
- Warnings can save lives and minimise harm by asking individuals, households, businesses or communities to take actions that reduce the risks of impacts during an emergency.

Key points

- The Australian government, along with state, territory and local government authorities have the primary responsibility to issue official warnings.
- **Partnerships** are crucial between all levels of government, emergency services organisations, the community, industry and business, and the media, to ensure communities receive, share and take action on warnings in an emergency.
- **Australia's Total Warning System** defines the essential elements of delivering warnings effectively, with a lifecycle of action before, during and after emergency. Each element of the Total Warning System plays a critical role, and all elements interact.
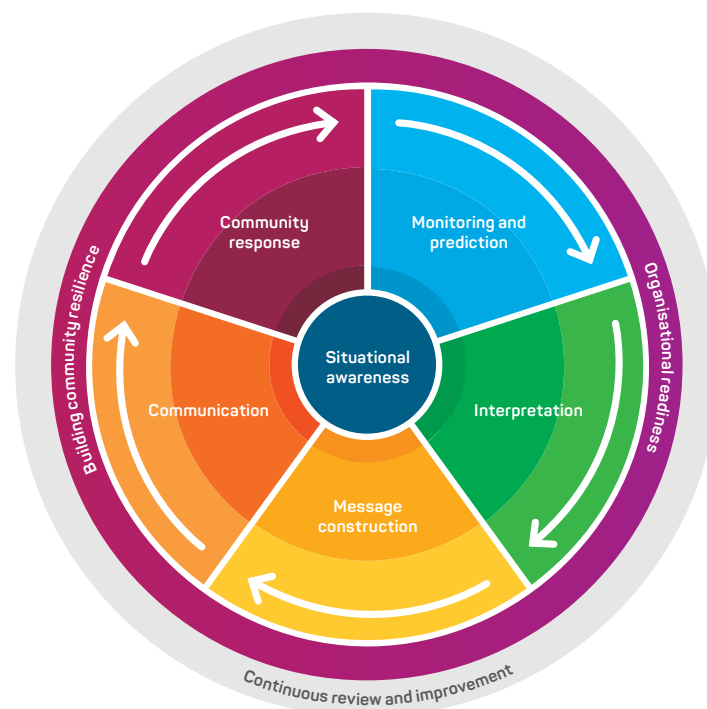

Figure 1: Australia's Total Warning System (AIDR 2021).

- **Warnings should contain concise information,** removing uncertainty where possible. Consistent, up-to-date information with sufficient detail across multiple sources, it is important to build confidence in the message and encourage action without further delay.

- **Authorities should work with a wide range of warning dissemination groups** who are trusted by individuals and communities. People are more likely to act on a warning when the source of that warning is from somewhere or someone they trust.

- **Barriers to action,** including cultural and language diversity, history within community, social or economic disadvantage, age, specific at-risk communities, telecommunications coverage, road access and conditions, should be considered when constructing a warning. If calls-to-action are to be followed, they should be practical and achievable.

Take action

- Review, download or print and use the *10 Warnings Principles and the Total Warning System*.

- Review *Warning message construction: choosing your words* which provides guidance on writing effective warning messages, proposes structures and language to use.

More information

- *Public Information and Warnings* (AIDR 2021)

- *AIDR's Warnings Collection* brings together key guidance material, research, information and professional development resources to support provision of effective warnings in Australia.

This brief is part of the quick guide series produced by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR). Quick guides for other handbooks in the collection can be found on the knowledge hub: knowledge.aidr.org.au

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