

On heatwave risk communication to the public: new evidence informing message tailoring and audience segmentation

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Natural hazards risk communication campaigns cannot be ‘all things to all people’. Conventionally, age (very young and older people) and pre-existing health conditions are employed as key vulnerability factors upon which messages are tailored and target audiences segmented. Arguably, these segmentation criteria are too blunt and are at risk of neglecting acutely vulnerable individuals and households who struggle with multiple, interlaced social vulnerabilities, including: poor quality housing, social isolation, living in ‘hot spot’ suburbs (urban heat islands caused by lack of vegetation), low socio-economic status, and health and mental health problems.

Our research findings suggest that greater attention should be paid to the tailoring of heatwave messages consistent with the ‘lived experience’, values and beliefs of vulnerable communities, which will improve the salience and persuasiveness of messages. Moreover, findings suggest that communicated heatwave information was commonly perceived as ‘redundant’ (superfluous and ‘common sense’ information).

Carefully tailored messages bearing contextualised and salient adaptation strategies may overcome information redundancy, empowering vulnerable individuals and households to enhance their resilience to heatwaves.