



Accessible Alerts – Communication tools in disaster response management for Deaf and hard of hearing communities

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Deaf and hard of hearing people are often at risk of being excluded from valuable public information traditionally broadcast in audio format. Time-critical information such as weather alerts and emergency announcements may be missed because they have not been heard.

The fast-changing digital landscape has led to a shift in the way people with sensory disabilities communicate and access their information, with mainstream technologies (such as smart devices) allowing greater access to equivalent information streams.

Community responses to emergency situations have shifted to align with this changing digital communication landscape. We are now able to mass circulate information through new tools such as social media and web application (apps).

'OpenAccess Alerts' is a smartphone app developed by national non-profit Conexu Foundation to address these fundamental inequalities for people who are Deaf or the one in six Australians who are hard of hearingⁱ.

Designed to leverage mainstream technology to enable the dissemination of information in accessible formats, the app enables the user to both post and receive geo-located, time-specific information in text format. The text format is ideal for those unable to hear public broadcast information such as that delivered on radio or television.

The technology has received recognition with a National Innovation Award from Telstra, Australia's leading internet and mobile service provider, and The Excellence in Social Participation award in the Australian Government's National Disability Awards for International Day of People with Disability.

In 2014 the Conexu Foundation partnered with Emergency Management Victoria to post all emergency alerts sent across the state into the app. This partnership allowed vital emergency information to be accessed by Deaf and hard of hearing Victorians, ahead of the bushfire season.

This presentation will explore the concept and drivers behind the app's development, and demonstrate the ease of use from a post initiator and post receiver perspective.

ⁱ Listen hear!: The economic impact and cost of hearing loss in Australia, Access Economics 2007