Communications Sector Group

Warrnambool Factsheet – CEO Community Service Providers

Do your disaster and business continuity plans consider the impacts of a prolonged telecommunications outage?

Telecommunications have become embedded in our everyday lives. Many community service providers and their customers now rely on telecommunications for the delivery of efficient and modern community services.

Despite the importance and increased reliance on telecommunications service, recent telecommunications outages (see case study below) have shown that many community service providers do not properly plan for prolonged outages. Proper disaster and business continuity planning is essential to ensure continued delivery of vital community service during such outages.

Well prepared Community Service Providers should be able to answer the following five questions:

1. **Do you have a continuity plan in place in the event of a telecommunications outage?**
2. **Would your organisation be able to manage its customers and staff without telecommunications?**
3. **Can your organisation provide adequate protections to the safety and wellbeing of staff if telecommunications are unavailable?**
4. **Is your organisation able to fall back on manual processing for administrative systems such as payroll?**
5. **Have you discussed the implications of a prolonged telecommunications outage with your telecommunications service providers?**

Warrnambool exchange fire case study – 'CSPs are not prepared'

On 22 November 2012, a fire damaged Telstra's exchange in Warrnambool, which acts as a transmission hub for telecommunications connectivity in the region. This left several communities and more than 100,000 people in South West Victoria without fixed-line telecommunications services. The outage lasted for up to three weeks.

The extended loss of telecommunications services in the Warrnambool region highlighted the important role they play in facilitating economic and social activities in Australian communities.

An Australian Governmnent inquiry into the event found that that many community service providers had not considered large scale or prolonged telecommunications outages in their emergency response and business continuity plans.

The inquiry found that the outage limited the ability of community service providers in the Warrnambool region to efficiently engage and manage their clients, including monitoring personal alert devices, telephoning clients to check their welfare or arrange visits, and contacting and managing staff for rosters and work schedules.

The inquiry also found that many of the community service clients experienced a sense of isolation and anxiety, particularly where they were housebound and felt they had no means of seeking assistance in an emergency. Community service providers had to regularly visit clients to check on their welfare, particularly clients whose safety they managed using personal alert devices. Many community service providers did not have the resources to regularly visit all clients.

Many organisations in the region had to develop response arrangements 'on the fly' during the outage. For example, community service providers needed to fall back to manual and face-to-face processes, such as physically visiting clients and having staff regularly report in.

Further information

- **www.communications.gov.au/telephone_services/warrnambool_inquiry**
- **www.business.gov.au**
- **www.disasterassist.gov.au**