

Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Supplementary Evidence provided by Associate Professor Tanya Notley following the May 23 public hearing.

Below I provide is the 5-minute introduction I had prepared for the Committee. Since the panel and Chair made a decision to move straight to discussion, I did not deliver this. Therefore, I am sharing this talk as additional evidence since the information provided is relevant to the broader Inquiry.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to speak here today. I am an academic researcher and for two decades my research has focused on digital inclusion and media literacy. Most recently my research has been investigating the role of media literacy in addressing mis- and disinformation and this is what I would like to speak to you about today.

This inquiry has included Mis- and disinformation as an area for consideration in recognition of the threat it poses to our society including to free and fair elections.

I recently took part in the G20 Information Integrity working group meetings in Sao Paolo because Australia is one of 34 signatories to the 2023 [Global Declaration](#) on Information Integrity Online. The Global declaration established that online Information Integrity needs to encompass three key areas: 1) the regulation of digital services to prevent the spread of misinformation and online harms, 2) strengthening public interest journalism to ensure a steady flow of reliable information, and 3) the promotion of media literacy education to empower citizens to critically evaluate online information sources

While we can see that the Australian federal government is now making progress toward the first two areas, I would argue that significant government resources have not yet been deployed to increase the media literacy of Australians, particularly adults.

I lead two national longitudinal surveys with a team of researchers from WSU, QUT, and the UC.

Our 2024 Adult Media Literacy survey—which will be launched in August – found that only 4 in 10 adults say they are confident they can check if information found online is true or not.

The results are very similar for young people. Our [2023 study](#) finds that just 4 in 10 children aged 8-16 are confident they can distinguish fake news from real news.

But it's one thing for people to believe they can spot misinformation and another thing to have evidence that shows they can do this. That is why we've just implemented [an Australian first study](#)—we tested more than 2000 adults to see if they can take basic steps to identify misinformation online. We will release the results of the survey later this year, but I would describe them as quite shocking. The results show that very few Australians have basic abilities that would allow them to fact-check information across online environments. For example, ¾ of adults could not correctly verify a post on Facebook.

Our research shows that those who use social media are more likely to encounter misinformation online. It's important that we remember that social media use strongly dominate the everyday media practices of adult Australians with more than 4 in 5 adults using social media on a daily basis.

The good news is that more than 4 in 5 adult Australians say they want access to media literacy education and support—for both children and adults. What we need to work out now is what kinds of initiatives work best. Media literacy is the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life, which means it is a lifelong pursuit. People need effective educational touchpoints across their lifetime to ensure they are able to update their media knowledge and abilities as technologies develop.

Relevant to this Inquiry though is that our research shows that higher media literacy is associated with a higher level of civic participation. And people who are more media literate are also more likely to use media for civic engagement in a thoughtful, careful and reflective way. This is because, media literate citizens are able to make better decisions about what information to trust but their media engagement also makes them feel more connected to society: both qualities are essential for democratic participation.

Australia is lagging behind when it comes to supporting media literacy education, especially for adults, but other governments have shown how much progress can be made in just a year or two with the right level of commitment. In many European countries, public cultural institutions lead national media literacy efforts because of the level of reach and trust they have. I believe this is the right approach for Australia too which is why I co-founded the [Australian Media Literacy Alliance](#) (AMLA)—which includes two universities and seven public cultural institutions. AMLA has been driving government and public interest in media literacy at a national level while building the capacity of thousands of key mediators such as teachers and librarians. However, sustained public funding is needed to extend AMLA's work and the work others are doing in this space. I really do believe this is a vital investment needed to help protect people, safeguard our democracy and address barriers that prevent people from fully participating in our society.