



Australian Library and
Information Association



Libraries help migrants become independent and resilient

A real opportunity, not to be missed

Public libraries provide a valued, yet fragmented service for diaspora communities, helping families settle in, learn English, gain skills and become full participants in Australian life.

How much more valuable would these services be if the Australian Government provided leadership to create a well-crafted national approach, practiced across more than 1400 communities? This could be achieved, simply by joining up what already happens locally.

What happens now

New arrivals need to see themselves reflected in the world around them. Otherwise they feel alienated. Libraries fulfil this mission and much, much more. Public libraries provide:



English language classes for adults



Information and advice about living, studying and working in Australia



Bilingual storytimes for families with young children



Collections such as oral histories, community newsletters, photographs and archives relating to specific communities and leaders



Tech training for all ages



Books, magazines, newspapers in up to 70 Languages Other Than English (LOTE) and English language learning kits, all free to view and borrow.

During COVID-19, all of the above has successfully moved online.

Three ways libraries across Australia could make a positive difference with the support of the federal government

1. National migrant support program

English language classes in public libraries are often oversubscribed. Some libraries have introduced crowd control measures for their bilingual storytimes. Other agencies direct people to libraries for help with form filling, with no prior consultation. There is no formal recognition of the role of libraries and therefore there is no potential for a guaranteed response to the needs of diaspora communities. We propose a national partnership program involving government agencies, public libraries, and other relevant community organisations such as Migrant Resource Centres, to ensure libraries have the capacity and resources to support diaspora communities to an equal degree, wherever they may be located.

2. Diverse collections

In addition, libraries need funding for the acquisition and digitisation of culturally diverse materials, to ensure that all Australians can see themselves reflected in our library collections. National, state and territory Libraries are working hard to increase the diversity of their print and digital collections, as are public libraries. There are complexities in sourcing print books in other languages, particularly where they are published in countries in conflict. Modest federal government investment in a national LOTE digitisation program would radically increase the availability of digital materials in community languages, and the capacity to connect communities with these collections onsite and online.

3. Minor amendment to legislation

And finally, we buy LOTE DVDs in such small quantities, there is no commercial return to suppliers who have to go through the current Australia classification system. We need a simple change to the Classifications Regulations to allow libraries to self-classify LOTE films for lending as well as for public exhibition.

Question on notice

The Inquiry committee asked for a snapshot of the services provided by public libraries in each state and territory. However, the situation is so fragmented that our best response is to provide headline figures for library services¹ and a few examples of how libraries have transformed their services for diaspora communities over the last six months. These stories represent a tiny fraction of the library activities for migrants being delivered across Australia.

ACT

10

public libraries

73,500

registered or active
public library members
(17% of population)

2 million

visits per annum

75,000

people attending
programs

90,000

LOTE items loaned
each year

11

English conversations classes
each week with, on average,

420

participants

¹ <https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla-public-library-stats-2018-19.pdf> and <https://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/public-library-services/advice-and-best-practice/public-library-statistics>

In 2019, more than 6000 people took part in 400 multicultural group meetings held in ACT public library meeting rooms, and during COVID-19, Libraries ACT has taken bilingual storytimes online and created sessions in Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Bangla, Hindi, Spanish, Farsi, Dari, Thai and Indonesian. These storytimes have been viewed more than 2000 times.

The National Library of Australia continues to grow a large oral history and folklore collection including stories from many diaspora communities. Its Celestial Empire exhibition, developed in partnership with the National Library of China in 2016, attracted 80,000 visitors over a 5-month period. Of these visitors, 20% did not speak English as their first language or speak English at home.

The Trove national discovery platform contains tens of thousands of publications relating to diaspora communities, and the National eDeposit service (NED) – a collaboration between the national, state and territory Libraries – provides a simple mechanism for community groups wishing to add their publications to the national collection.

NSW

363

public libraries

3.1 million

registered or active
public library members
(39% of population)

34 million

visits per annum

1.9 million

people attending
programs

954,000

loans of LOTE items

52,000

language learning kits,
borrowed

92,000 times

Parramatta Libraries' new LOTE podcasts include COVID-19, general health, domestic violence prevention, winter fire safety, scam alerts and tax. Online programs have attracted 6,000 views, but most popular has been a series of mobile technology instructional videos delivered in Mandarin. Randwick Library has translated pandemic information into Chinese, Greek, Indonesian, Russian and Spanish for its users, and runs TechConnect classes in Chinese, helping people stay connected during lockdown using smart phones and tablets. Similarly, Liverpool City Library has commenced a Tech Savvy Seniors online program in Hindi, in partnership with TAFE, Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre, Navitas and Hume Housing.

As a refugee resettlement area, Wagga Wagga City Library runs the Language Café English conversation classes for those who are not eligible for free TAFE classes. Nearly 3,000 people have participated over three years and during COVID, the classes continued on Facebook.

The State Library of New South Wales has loaned over 100,000 books and online publications per year, in over 40 languages across the State as part of its LOTE loans program. Digital literacy training is offered in Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Hindi, Italian, Greek, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish, Tamil and Vietnamese in partnership with the Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW.

Northern Territory

32

public libraries

72,000

registered or active
public library members
(29% of population)

859,000

visits per annum

80,000

people attending
programs

Queensland

320+

public libraries

2 million

registered or active
public library members
(39% of population)

21 million

visits per annum

1.8 million

people attending
programs

Brisbane City Libraries has translated forms into Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese, to explain the reasons behind data collection for contact tracing and help people from less democratic societies feel more comfortable with the concept.

The State Library of Queensland provides access to ebooks, magazines and newspapers in over 70 languages, and films in over 50 languages. The stories of CALD communities are a collecting priority, with recent projects involving the Hebrew, Samoan, Greek, Chinese, Italian and South Sea Islander communities in Brisbane.

South Australia

139

public libraries

551,000

registered or active
public library members
(32% of population)

9.9 million

visits per annum

528,000

people attending
programs

Adelaide Hills Library has worked with the Inverbrackie Detention Centre at Woodside, organising bulk loans of English and LOTE materials, and Mount Gambier Library has expanded English classes for the Yazidi population to include pictorial driving lessons. Port Lincoln Libraries has provided Justice of the Peace services for people needing help with immigration issues.

The State Library of South Australia provides ebooks and audiobooks in ten languages other than English; with digital newspapers and magazines offered in over 60 languages, sourced from over 100 countries.

The SA Public Libraries Network last year ran Community Engagement Training for staff with a focus on CALD communities, and produced flyers promoting community language collections and services in Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Malayalam, Panjabi, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Sinhalese, Spanish, Tamil and Vietnamese. The network also links users to the Road to IELTS (International English Language Test) program, with 506 hours of training recorded in the last quarter.

Tasmania

47

public libraries

124,000

registered or active
public library members
(23% of population)

2.9 million

visits per annum

107,000

people attending
programs

In 2018-2019, Libraries Tasmania recorded 6,002 adult attendances in 532 programs including English Conversation and Language Classes, Citizenship Preparation and Bi-lingual Storytime programs. Libraries Tasmania's community languages web page continues to connect users to information about the Road to IELTS and to English conversation groups taking place nearby. For the Bhutanese and Nepalese community in Launceston, there is a special program to help people prepare for their citizenship test.

Victoria

276

public libraries

2.2 million

registered or active
public library members
(34% of population)

30.8 million

visits per annum

2.3 million

people attending
programs

In 2018-2019 Victorian public libraries held 450,668 collection items in 79 languages other than English, with the top four languages being Chinese, Italian, Vietnamese and Greek.

Hume Libraries has run 'how to Zoom on your phone' sessions in Vietnamese, Arabic, Turkish, Punjabi, Sinhala and English, while Darebin Libraries has partnered with the Migrant Workers Centre to create online sessions about employment rights under Australian law.

Casey Cardinia Libraries are reconfiguring old PCs destined for landfill as lending items for families without technology at home.

Yarra Plenty Regional Libraries contacted library users whose first language was Arabic, Turkish, Macedonian, Greek, Italian or Vietnamese, in language, and posted out LOTE care boxes of books to everyone who wanted one. City of Melbourne Libraries' online bilingual storytimes on YouTube have continued the success of the Library at The Dock team, who attracted more than 7,500 children and adults to these physical events in 2019. The sessions not only help children with English, but also their caregivers.

State Library Victoria also runs bilingual programs and holds a browsing collection of bilingual picture books for children. With 44% of SLV's visitors speaking a language other than English at home, its Volunteer Greeter Program provides assistance in Japanese, French, Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Romanian, Hindi, Filipino, Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Spanish, Gujarati, Korean and Urdu.

Western Australia

233

public libraries

878,000

registered or active
public library members
(34% of population)

10.1 million

visits per annum

683,000

people attending
programs

City of Swan Library is launching 'Proud Ladies' social English language group as a child-friendly, women-only program for the Iraqi community.

The State Library of Western Australia has partnered with the WA Office of Multicultural Affairs to provide collections that support language teaching by community organisations in over 40 languages reflecting the Western Australian community. Of these, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, Hindi and Farsi are the most heavily used languages. The use of this collection steadily averages around 175 items per month from a total collection size of 3163 items.