



As we head into the 2022 federal election, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) encourages candidates to adopt the library agenda.

#### **1. Qualified library staff in every school library**

School libraries play a vital role in fostering a love of reading, developing students' literacy, helping students develop information-seeking skills, be safe online and recognise the difference between facts and misinformation.

#### **2. Greater recognition of the important part libraries play in literacy and learning for all**

ALIA supports several campaigns and organisations which promote literacy. We support lifelong learning through Adult Learning Australia; digital and media literacy through the Australian Media Literacy Alliance; and literacy through the Australia Reads campaign. There is often a focus on school age children and young people, which ignores the reality of a population where four in 10 adults struggle with everyday reading. Libraries play an enormous role in supporting literacy skills for all ages through programs, resources, events.

#### **3. Development and adoption of the proposed national early literacy strategy**

Following ALIA's 2016 National Early Literacy Summit, we have been part of a coalition of early childhood peak bodies, including Early Childhood Australia, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, Speech Pathology Australia, the Australian Literacy Educators' Association, The Smith Family, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, National and State Libraries Australia, and Indigenous literacy charities.

#### **4. Recognition of the role libraries play in media literacy**

Libraries play an important role in promoting and supporting media literacy. Ensuring that communities are media literate is critical for a competitive and informed nation. ALIA calls for continued government support of campaigns and initiatives which support and further media literacy.

#### **5. Scaled up recognition of the important part libraries play in digital inclusion**

There is greater awareness in federal government circles of the role of public libraries in digital inclusion and over the last few years, this has resulted in programs with the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, the Department of Social Services and the Australian Digital Health Agency but more can be done to ensure that digital transformation does not lead to digital exclusion. ALIA calls for funding for esafe library initiatives and training in community libraries.

#### **6. Greater emphasis on quality library services for tertiary students enrolled in universities, TAFEs and private Registered Training Organisations**

Australia's education sector has been deeply impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic education was Australia's third largest export, with more than half a million international students contributing in excess of \$26 billion to our national economy.

According to Universities Australia, Australian universities lost more than 17,300 jobs in 2020 and lost an estimated \$1.8 billion in revenue compared to 2019. In addition, there are more than a million domestic students studying in Australian universities and four million students enrolled in TAFE courses. Students at established universities and TAFEs benefit from the full support of a library and information service, however, we know that standards vary across the sector.

#### **7. Embedding the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in government policy**

As a UN Member State, Australia signed up to the SDG in 2015. The SDG are gradually gaining momentum at federal, state, territory and local level, and ALIA has been a prime advocate for their adoption as a planning framework at all levels of government.

## **8. Improved access to data and scholarly information through the development and trial of open access models for government-funded research**

The federal government has made significant progress in opening up its own government data, for example through the development of the data.gov.au portal and its interest in new data sharing and release legislation. However, open access models for government-funded research outside government departments and agencies remain unresolved.

## **9. Halt to government library closures and greater recognition of the role of library and information professionals in evidence-based decision-making**

Over the last several years, we have seen too many federal, state and territory department libraries close or be required to function on much reduced budgets and staffing levels. Search engines are useful tools, but they don't replace the skills of library and information professionals, nor do they encompass the specialist databases needed to create comprehensive, authoritative, decision-ready results. The skills of information professionals are essential for evidence-based policy, based on relevant, reliable, authoritative sources.

## **10. A national response to the need for improved access to Australian Standards**

Australian Standards are enshrined in law, yet ordinary Australians can only access these essential instruments if they have the money to pay for them or if they can find a library which subscribes to Standards Australia. Fewer libraries now provide this service because of significant price increases in recent years and online access is restricted because the sales agents for Standards Australia have failed to produce affordable subscription models which have the necessary functionality for digital lending. For the most part, library access is still onsite, expensive and extremely restrictive.

## **11. Further copyright law reform**

Australian libraries work hard to ensure that communities across Australia, no matter how remote, can access educational, cultural and historical materials. Modernisation of copyright law to allow digitisation and digital delivery is essential for libraries to continue this work.

## **12. Modernising lending rights to support Australian literature**

In Australia, authors earn on average only \$12,000 per annum from their writing. It is vital that all parts of the book industry, from the creator through to the reader, work together to improve this return and urge government to help create an environment that supports homegrown talent and a vibrant publishing industry.

When Australians borrow books from public and educational libraries in Australia, Australian authors and publishers receive a payment through the Federal Government's lending rights schemes.

## **13. Accredited and affordable library and information qualifications**

To continue to thrive, libraries and information services need to attract a diverse range of people with the interest and aptitude to excel in a rapidly changing information environment. The recent increase in fees for commonwealth supported places for library and information degrees are a substantial barrier to people entering tertiary study and will have the effect of deterring people who could make a great contribution to the information and education needs of Australia from gaining library and information qualifications.

## **14. Funding for library buildings as a vital element of Australia's knowledge infrastructure**

Historically libraries have been both included and neglected in critical infrastructure and building projects. ALIA calls for libraries being consistently prioritised during these major projects in recognition of their role in promoting social inclusion for marginalised and disadvantaged groups through the provision of targeted programs, access to technology and free educational resources.

## **15. Funding for the delivery of e-government services through public libraries**

Public libraries often bear the brunt of assisting members of the community engage with government information and processes when they move online. Federal government digital initiatives have generally been introduced without consideration of the impact they will have on local government-funded public libraries and their limited staffing.