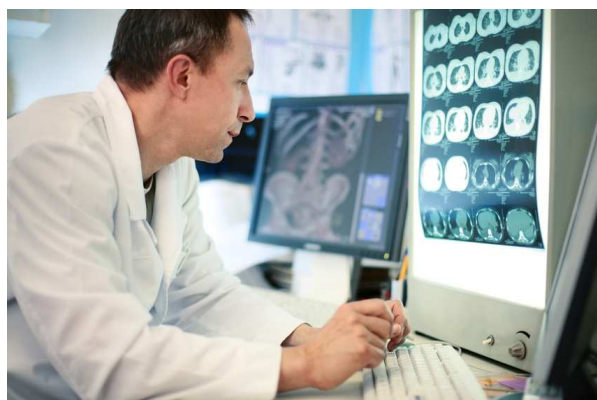# Questions of life and death

An investigation into the value of health library and information services in Australia

"An invaluable resource if I am to provide the latest and best evidence based care to my clients."

An initiative of Health Libraries Inc, supported by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) October 2012

INTRODUCTION

Health libraries across Australia, and indeed the world, are under pressure from funding cuts, and it is against this backdrop that Health Libraries Inc and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) have collaborated to carry out this investigation into the value of health library and information services in Australia.

The survey results were announced at the 9th Health Libraries Inc conference 2012, *Staying Alive, Empowering and Valuing Health Libraries and Information Services*, and they describe a situation where, over the last three years, the majority of health libraries have remained static or experienced a decrease in print/e-resources, staff hours and space, and yet there has been a substantial increase in users and a significant shift to new electronic resources.

Australian health library and information services urgently need investment to maintain their excellent service to medical practitioners, which is shown, by the survey results, to impact directly on positive health outcomes for patients.

We hope colleagues will use these survey results to advocate for their library and information services.

For more information, contact:
Laura Foley, Health Libraries Inc T: 03 8517 5305 E: lfoley@anzca.edu.au
Sue McKerracher, ALIA T: 02 6215 8222 E: sue.mckerracher@alia.org.au

Health Libraries Inc is a dynamic group of information professionals committed to health information provision, resource sharing, professional development, consortia implementation and relevance to the community that we serve. Based in Victoria, Health Libraries Inc promotes excellence in health libraries across Australia.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the national association for library and information professionals. Our 5,500 members include both institutions and individuals with library and information science qualifications. We also welcome people from other disciplines who work in the library and information sector.

CONTENTS

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Background research

In August/September 2012, 250 people took part in two surveys designed to determine the value and impact of Australian health libraries. One was a survey of service users; the other, a survey of library and information professionals.

The results confirmed the significant contribution made by library and information services, through their service delivery, technology, space, collections, and most of all, the surveys confirmed the value of employing qualified library and information professionals.

1.2 Role of health library and information services

The role of health library and information services could be summarised under four headings:

1. The provision of essential information
98% of users had borrowed items
90% had used books
86% had used electronic resources
64% had used print journals

3. The provision of support services
41% of users had used copying facilities
38% had used document delivery
36% had used literature review
30% had used training

2. The provision of expert assistance
84% of users had been helped by staff

4. The provision of facilities
70% of users had studied in the library
69% had used computers in the library

1.3 Usage of health library and information services

The usage of health library and information services could also be summarised under four headings:

1. Skills development
66% of users used it for professional development
27% used it for teaching/supervision

3. Innovation
53% used it for personal research
11% used it for funded research

2. Service improvement
57% used it for patient care
12% used it for service development and planning

4. Due diligence
5% used it for legal/ethical issues
4% used it for audit

62% of service users had asked a library and information professional to carry out information searches for them; 75% of those who had, said it improved the quality of the information received and 71% said it saved them time.

Use of the service depended on respondents' roles and responsibilities. The low percentages recorded for "service development and planning", "legal/ethical issues" and "audit" reflected the fact that few of the people replying to the survey would have these concerns in their jurisdiction.

On average, library and information services achieved a 'market share' of 35% ie just over a third of the potential number of service users taking up the opportunity to use it.

In more than 60% of cases, respondents said the number of library users had increased over the last three years, by 32% on average.

The majority of interaction was now by email (58%), with face-to-face interaction showing a 75% decrease over the last three years and telephone interaction a decrease of 50%. This marked a major shift in the way library and information professionals delivered services. There were concerns that this made the service less visible to users and potential users.

1.4 Outcomes of health library and information services

Library and information service users were asked how they believed their use of the service over the last year had helped them.

1. Skills development
95% said it had helped them progress their studies
76% said it had helped them achieve higher marks in their exams

2. Service improvement
83% said it had helped them improve health outcomes for their patients
76% said it had changed their thinking and improved their diagnosis or treatment plan

3. Innovation
95% said it helped them discover new and valuable information
86% said it helped keep them abreast of the latest clinical developments
82% said it helped them progress their research

4. Due diligence
65% said it had helped them confirm their diagnosis or treatment plan

1.5 Satisfaction levels of service users

Health library and information services were highly rated by users:

99% satisfaction level for library staff
98% satisfaction with the literature review service
97% satisfaction with the document delivery service
97% satisfaction with the library space
97% satisfaction with the range of print journals
91% satisfaction with the range of electronic resources
85% satisfaction with the library website

Aggregated satisfaction levels in terms of the four roles of library and information services were:

99% for expertise
94% for facilities
93% for information content
93% for information services

1.6 Investment in library and information services

Nearly a third of respondents (32%) had a budget of less than $20,000 per annum for print and e-resources. In 38% of cases, the budget had decreased over the last three years. Only 6% of respondents anticipated an increase in the budget for the next 12 months, while 35% expected a decrease. This was despite the fact that 90% of library users had used books, and 86% had accessed e-resources over the last year.

Library staffing levels had also dropped over the last three years in more than a third of cases (35%). The average decrease was reported to be 42 hours, or more than one full time equivalent position. Over the next 12 months, 15% of respondents expected a further fall in staff hours, with only 3% believing staffing levels would increase.

Library spaces have shrunk over the last three years for 30% of respondents. For some, this would have been less of an issue, as e-resources have taken over from print collections in some places. However, a number of respondents to both the library user and the library and information professionals' survey commented on the continuing need for print books and journals.

Nearly three-quarters of library and information professionals (74%) felt that future investment in their website was critical, followed by 67% e-resources and 64% more staff hours. This echoed the views of library users, in that library websites and e-resources showed the lowest levels of satisfaction. There were also many user comments supporting more staff and longer opening hours.

1.7 Issues

Library users felt improvements could be made in the areas of technology, e-resources, print collection, more staff hours, alternative ways of accessing library services and the physical space.

Library and information professionals were concerned about a number of issues:

- Reduction in staff hours having a detrimental effect on the delivery of services
- Lack of budget for essential print and e-resources
- Visibility of the service in the digital environment
- Continuing need for print collections
- Uncertainty about the future
- Lack of understanding about the value of the service at senior level

The initial results of this survey were shared with delegates at the 9th Health Libraries Inc conference, held at the State Library of Victoria, on 19th October, 2012. There was a general feeling among delegates that, following these surveys, more work should be carried out in terms of research into the impact of health library and information services, in order to advocate for further investment and support at the most senior management levels in health organisations.

2 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF SERVICE USERS

2.1 Methodology and respondents

This online survey ran throughout September 2012 and attracted 128 respondents, including nurses, doctors, students, researchers and allied health professionals (chart 1).

Chart 1

2.2 Usage of the library and information service

A health library meant different things to different people, depending on their roles and responsibilities. The most frequently used services were electronic resources (48%), items to borrow (41%), books (36%), computers (31%), quiet study areas (26%) and contact with a librarian (26%) – (chart 2).

The ranking of how services were used (occasionally or frequently) was:

1. Borrow items   98%
2. Read/use books   89%
3. Use electronic resources   86%
4. Contact with a librarian   84%
5. Use computers for work/study   69%
6. Quiet study   69%
7. Read/use print journals   64%
8. Check email   46%
9. Photocopying   41%
10. Document delivery   38%
11. Literature review by library staff   36%
12. Training   30%
13. Group study   23%

How have you used the library service at this hospital/institute over the past year?

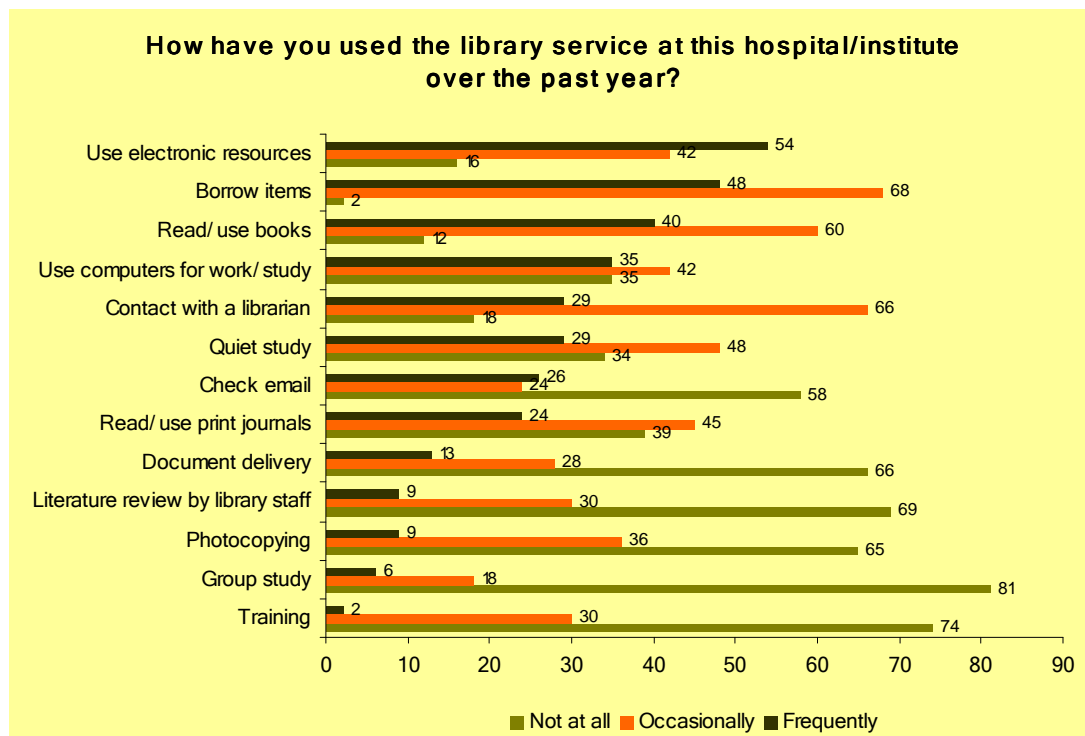| Category	Not at all	Occasionally	Frequently
Use electronic resources	16	42	54
Borrow items	2	68	48
Read/use books	12	60	40
Use computers for work/study	35	42	35
Contact with a librarian	18	66	29
Quiet study	34	48	29
Check email	58	24	26
Read/use print journals	39	45	24
Document delivery	66	28	13
Literature review by library staff	69	30	9
Photocopying	65	36	9
Group study	81	18	6
Training	74	30	2

■ Not at all ■ Occasionally ■ Frequently

Chart 2

Health professionals used library and information services to support skills development, service improvement, innovation and due diligence (chart 3).

What have been your information needs over the last year?

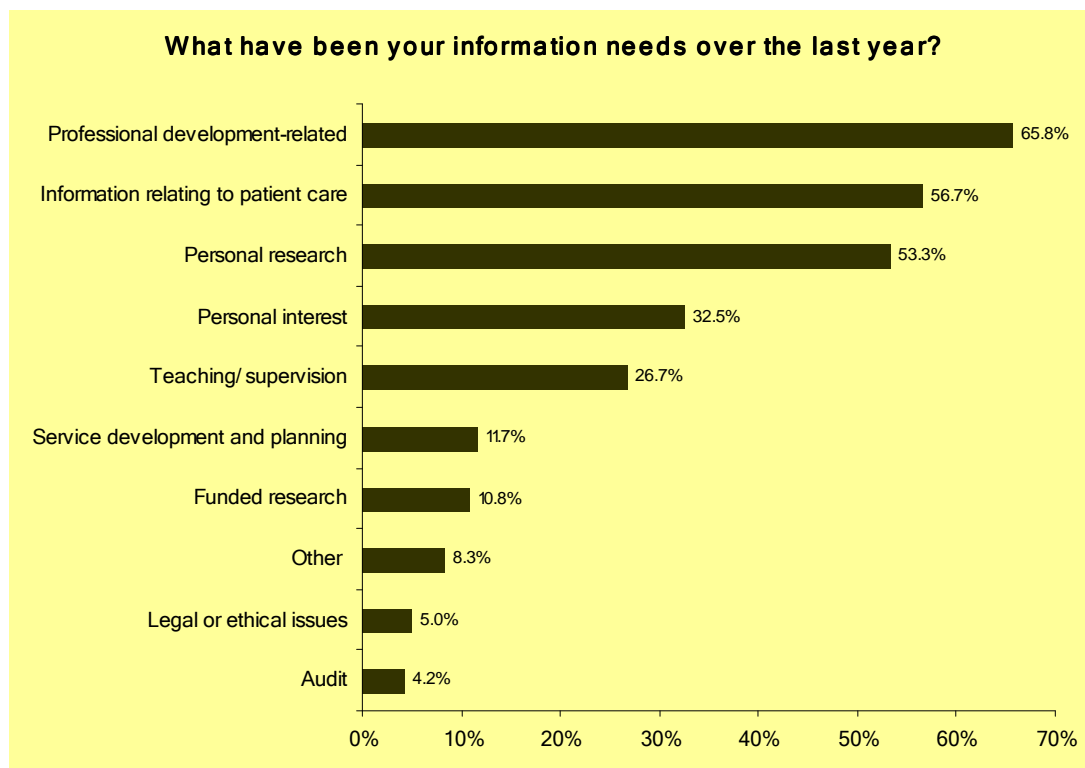| Category	Percentage
Professional development-related	65.8%
Information relating to patient care	56.7%
Personal research	53.3%
Personal interest	32.5%
Teaching/supervision	26.7%
Service development and planning	11.7%
Funded research	10.8%
Other	8.3%
Legal or ethical issues	5.0%
Audit	4.2%

Chart 3

62% had asked a library and information professional to carry out information searches for them. 75% said professional help had improved the quality of information; 71% said it helped save time, and 43% said it helped improve the quantity of information.

2.3 Benefits of using the library and information service

Respondents said that their use of the service over the last year had helped to a significant extent with progressing their studies (63%), discovering new and valuable information (56%), keeping abreast of the latest clinical developments (45%), progressing their research (43%) and helping them achieve higher marks in their exams (34%) – (chart 4).

The ranking of the benefit of using the service (to some extent or to a significant extent):

1.   It has helped me progress my studies   95%
2.   It has helped me discover new and valuable information   95%
3.   It has helped me keep abreast of the latest clinical developments   86%
4.   It has helped me improve the health outcomes for my patients   83%
5.   It has helped me progress my research   82%
6.   It has helped me achieve higher marks in my exams   76%
7.   It has changed my thinking and improved my diagnosis/treatment plan   76%
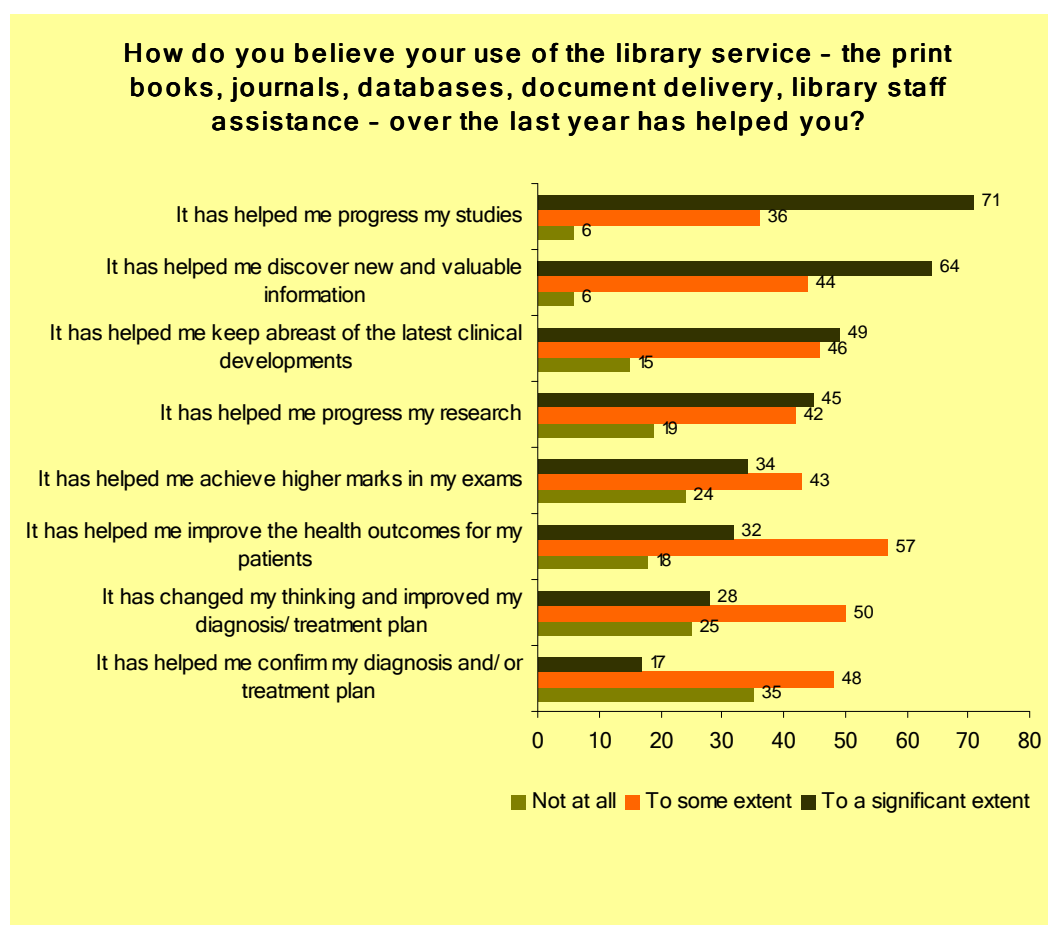8.   It has helped me confirm my diagnosis/treatment plan   65%

Chart 4

2.4 User satisfaction

Users were very satisfied with the library staff (59%), followed by the range of electronic resources (42%), library space (37%), range of printed books (35%), and document delivery service (30%) – (chart 5).

The ranking by level of satisfaction (satisfied and very satisfied) was:

1. Library staff   99%
2. Literature review service   98%
3. Document delivery service   97%
4. Library space   97%
5. Range of print journals   97%
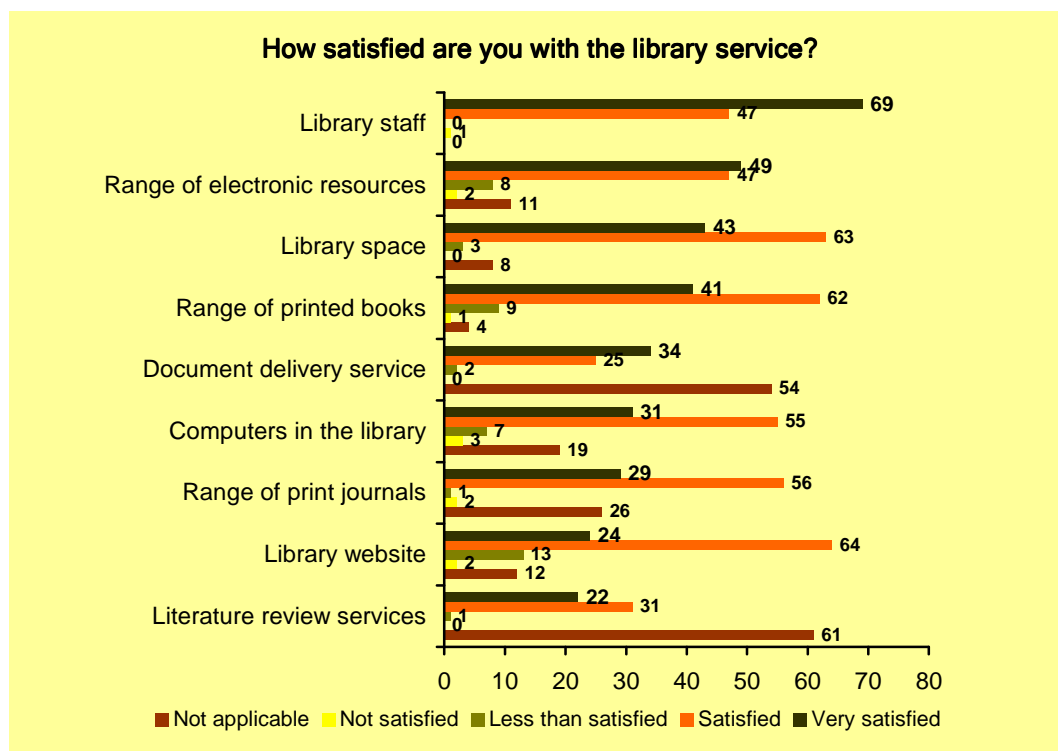6. Range of electronic resources   91%
7. Library website   85%

How satisfied are you with the library service?

Category	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Less than satisfied	Not satisfied	Not applicable
Library staff	69	47	0	0	
Range of electronic resources	49	47	8	2	11
Library space	43	63	3	0	8
Range of printed books	41	62	9	1	4
Document delivery service	34	25	2	0	54
Computers in the library	31	55	7	3	19
Range of print journals	29	56	1	2	26
Library website	24	64	13	2	12
Literature review services	22	31	1	0	61

Chart 5

This is a selection of the comments received:

"The librarian often thinks of things I haven't, in a way I haven't thought of."

"Library staff are knowledgeable, approachable and helpful."

"I genuinely believe that the library needs to be better supported as the library staff routinely go beyond the call of duty to respond to my requests."

"I like the study booths at the library, it is an excellent place to concentrate."

"An invaluable resource if I am to provide the latest and best evidence based care to my clients."

"Your excellent library service is why I keep paying my annual membership fees."

"Your library service is generous, responsive, thorough and highly professional. And colleagues around my desk endorse these views."

"You are such a supporter of patient safety."

"I have engaged the services of the library on numerous occasions and must admit to being incredibly impressed with the speed of the service, the quality of the service and the professional and courteous way in which they have responded to all of my queries."

"I heard that you guys were absolute legends, and you are!"

"<u>WE</u> got a distinction."

2.5 Other ways in which the library and information service could help

Respondents were asked if there were any other ways in which their library and information service could help them. Suggestions for new and improved services included:

Technology
"Having wifi available in the library"
"Better search function for the catalogue"

Electronic resources
"Easier access to electronic versions of medical and related journals"
"Greater range of full text electronic access journal articles"

Print collection
"More textbooks"
"More printed journals and books"

Expertise
"Keep employing qualified librarians"
"Full-time librarian service"

Access
"Access to library outside current hours"
"Extend borrowing times"
"Access to e-resources for from-home study"

Facilities
"More quiet study group rooms"

3 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS

3.1 Methodology and respondents

This online survey ran throughout September 2012 and attracted 122 respondents, from many different types of health establishments (chart 6), and from across Australia (chart 7).
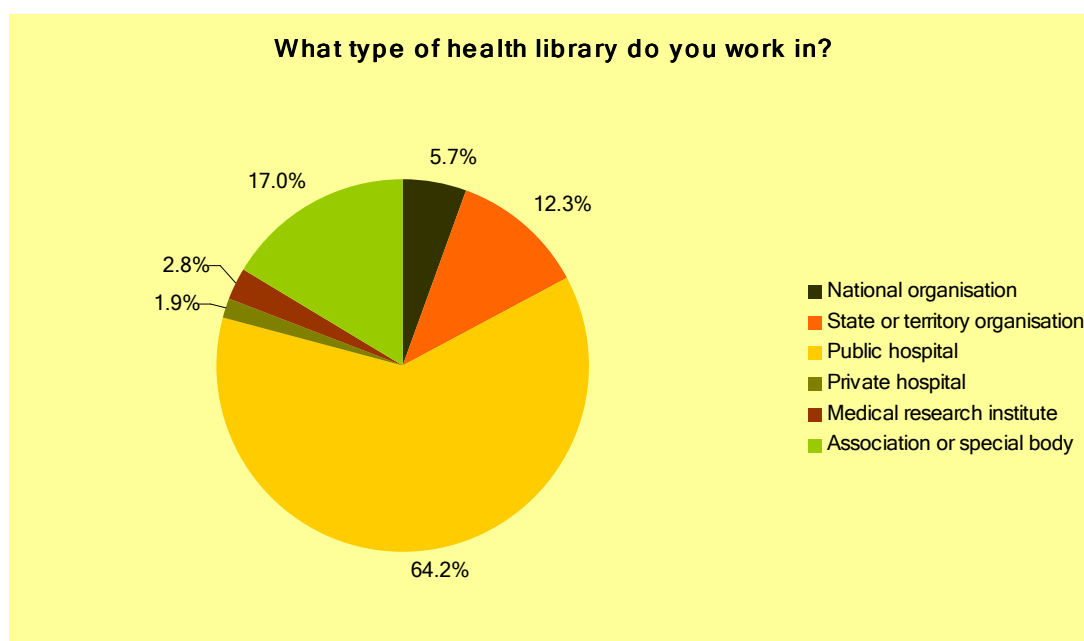
What type of health library do you work in?

- 5.7%
- 12.3%
- 17.0%
- 2.8%
- 1.9%
- 64.2%

- ■ National organisation
- ■ State or territory organisation
- ■ Public hospital
- ■ Private hospital
- ■ Medical research institute
- ■ Association or special body

Chart 6

Where do you work?

- 4.1%
- 0.8%
- 22.3%
- 0.0%
- 5.0%
- 5.0%
- 5.0%
- 57.9%

- ■ ACT
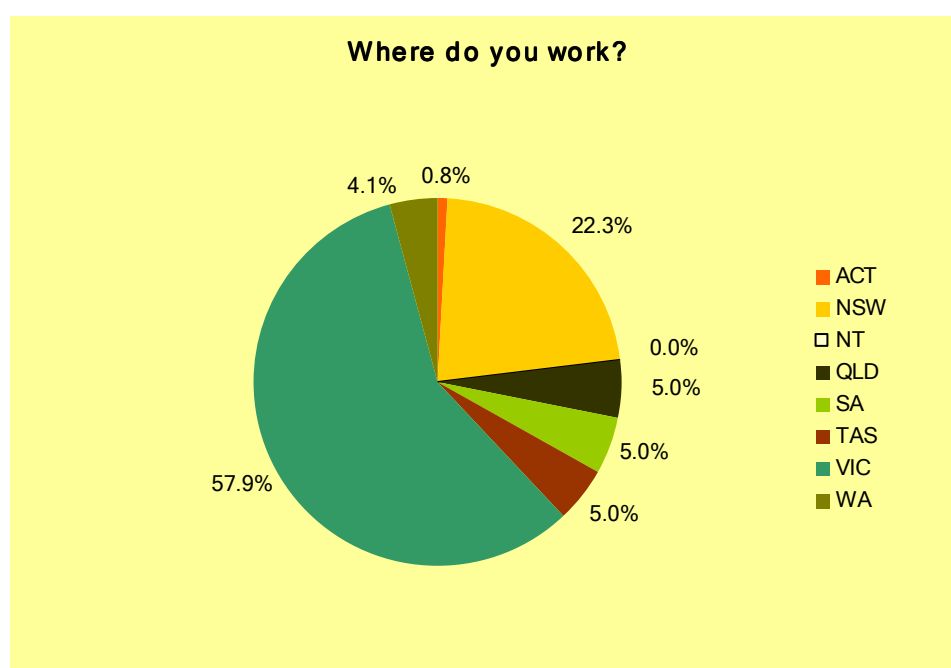- ■ NSW
- □ NT
- ■ QLD
- ■ SA
- ■ TAS
- ■ VIC
- ■ WA

Chart 7

3.2 Usage of the library and information service

Each service's potential number of library users ranged from a few hundred through to 60,000 and library staff were generally reporting around 35% take up.

In more than 60% of cases, the number of library users had increased over the last three years (chart 8), and within these services, the number of library users had increased on average by 32%. In the 11% of cases where there was a decrease, the number of library users had decreased on average by 23%.
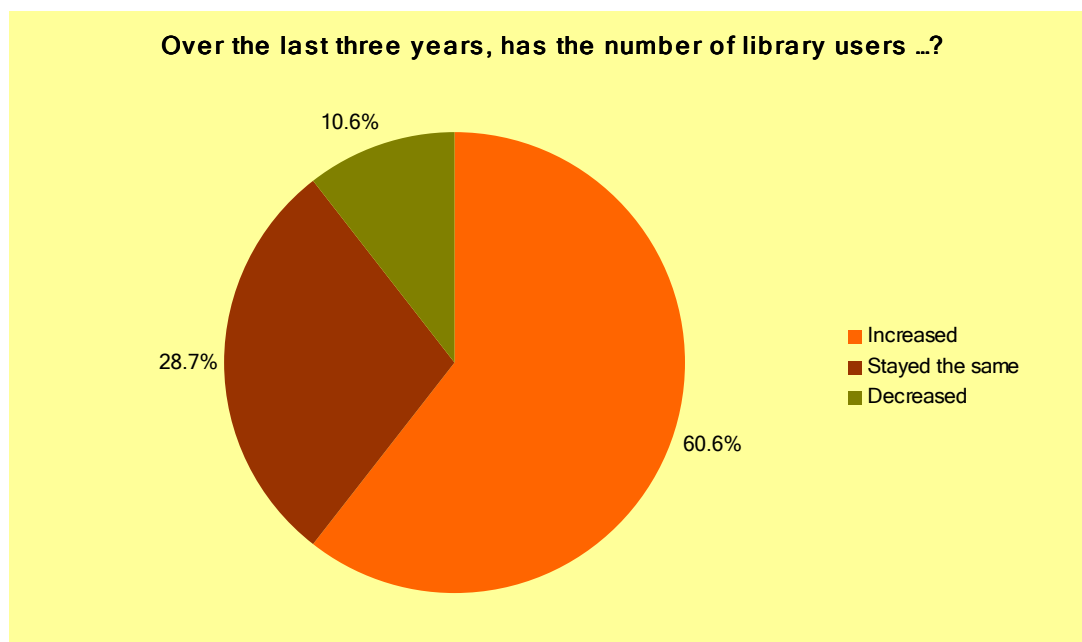
Over the last three years, has the number of library users …?

10.6%

28.7%

60.6%

- ■ Increased
- ■ Stayed the same
- ■ Decreased

Chart 8

The majority of interaction with users (58%) was by email (chart 9).

Approximately what % of your interaction with users is ...?

28.13

58.13

18.75

- ■ Face-to-face
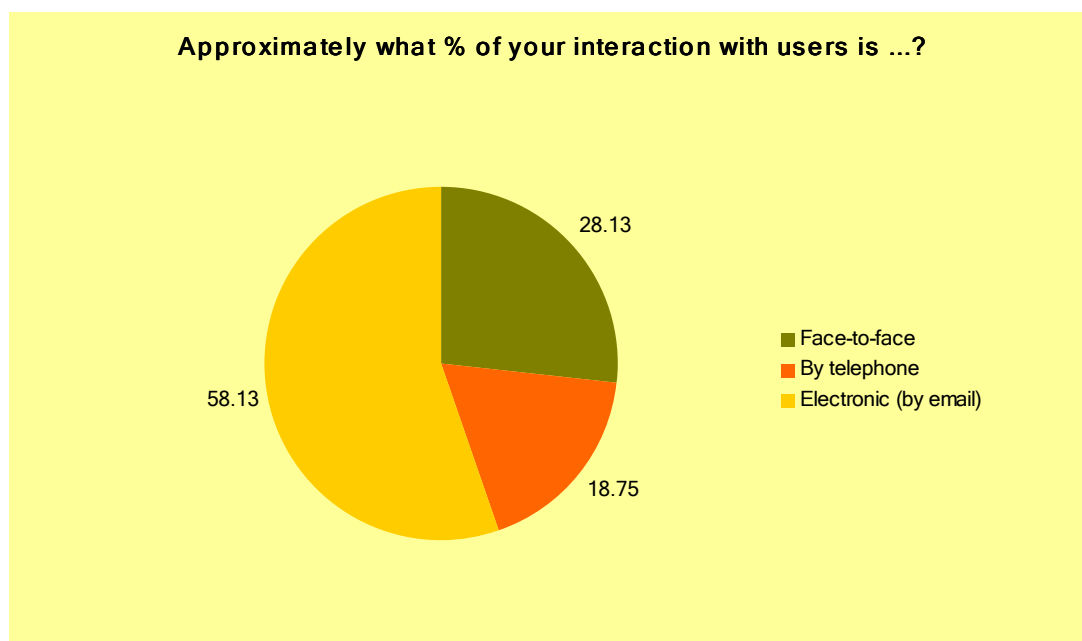- ■ By telephone
- ■ Electronic (by email)

Chart 9

This demonstrated a significant shift over the last three years, with the level of face-to-face interaction decreasing by 75% (chart 10), the level of telephone interaction by 50% (chart 11), while the level of electronic interaction increased by 87.5% (chart 12).
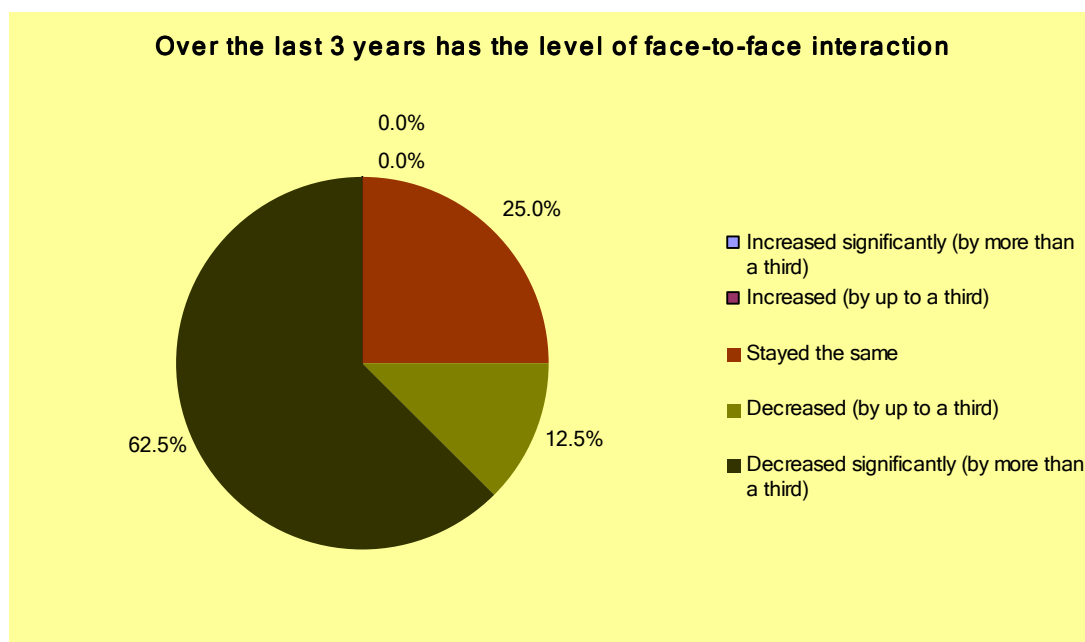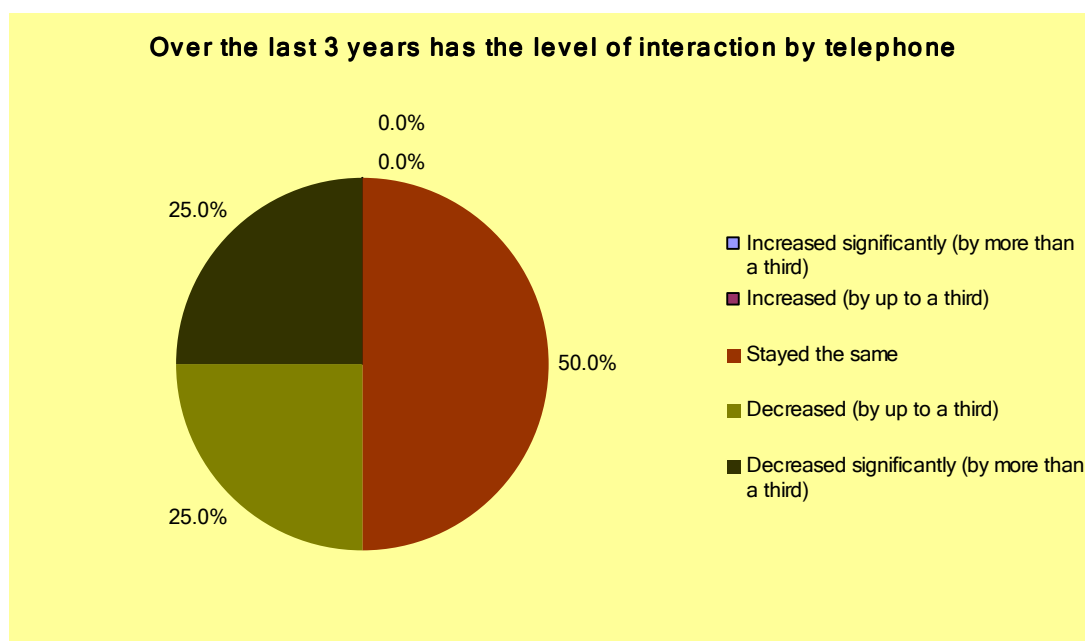
Over the last 3 years has the level of face-to-face interaction

- Increased significantly (by more than a third)
- Increased (by up to a third)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (by up to a third)
- Decreased significantly (by more than a third)

0.0%
0.0%
25.0%
12.5%
62.5%

Chart 10

Over the last 3 years has the level of interaction by telephone

- Increased significantly (by more than a third)
- Increased (by up to a third)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (by up to a third)
- Decreased significantly (by more than a third)

0.0%
0.0%
25.0%
25.0%
25.0%
50.0%

Chart 11

Over the last three years has the level of electronic interaction

0.0%
0.0%
12.5%

■ Increased significantly (by more than a third)

■ Increased (by up to a third)

■ Stayed the same

50.0%

□ Decreased (by up to a third)
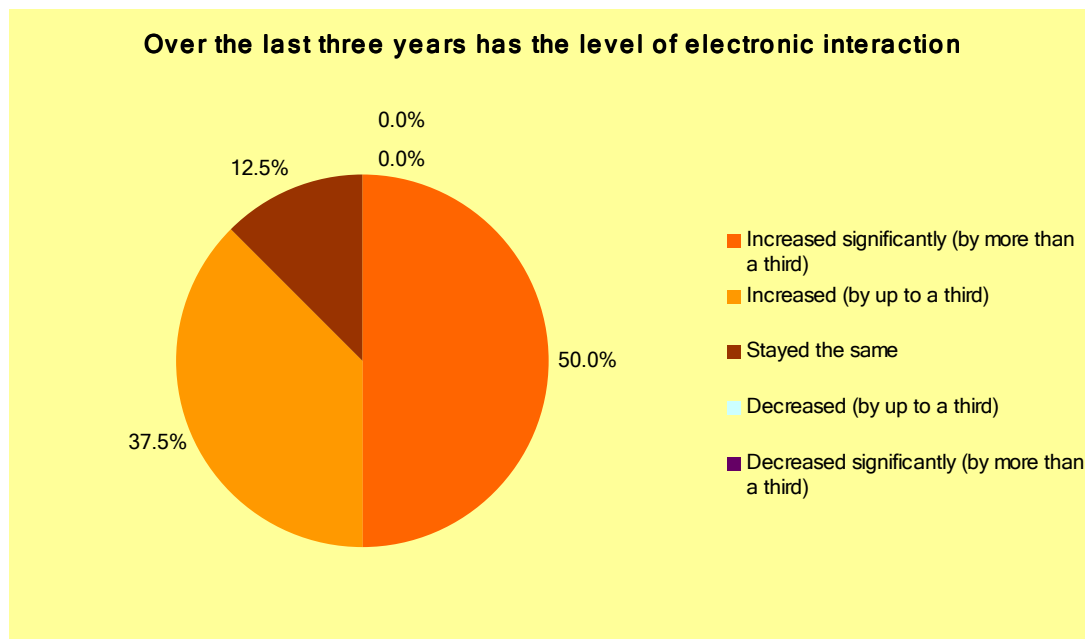
37.5%

■ Decreased significantly (by more than a third)

Chart 12

3.3 Investment in print and e-resources

Respondents' annual print and e-resources budgets ranged from $2000 through to $560,000. Nearly a third of the respondents (32%) had an annual budget of less than $20,000 – (chart 13).

What is your annual print/e-resources budget?

1.6%
11.1%
3.2%
4.8%

31.7%

■ Less than $20,000
■ $20,000-$49,999
■ $50,000-$99,999
■ $100,000-$199,999
■ $200,000-$299,999
■ $300,000-$399,999
■ $400,000-$499,999
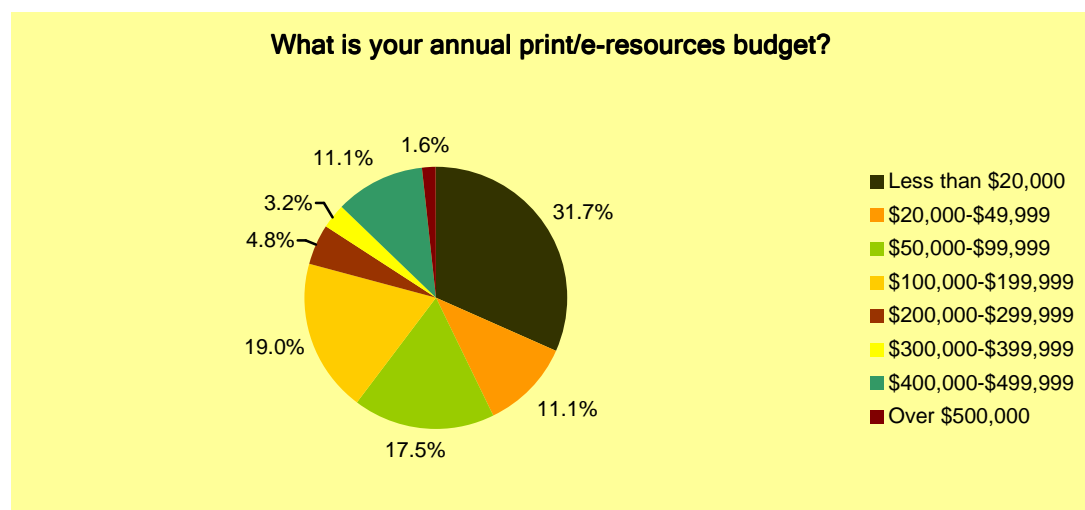■ Over $500,000

19.0%

11.1%

17.5%

Chart 13

Over the last three years, in more than a third of cases (38%), the annual print and e-resources budget had decreased (chart 14). There had been a real increase in spending in only 18% of cases.

Where there had been a budget increase, the average increase was reported to be 14%. Where it had decreased, the average decrease was reported to be 80%.
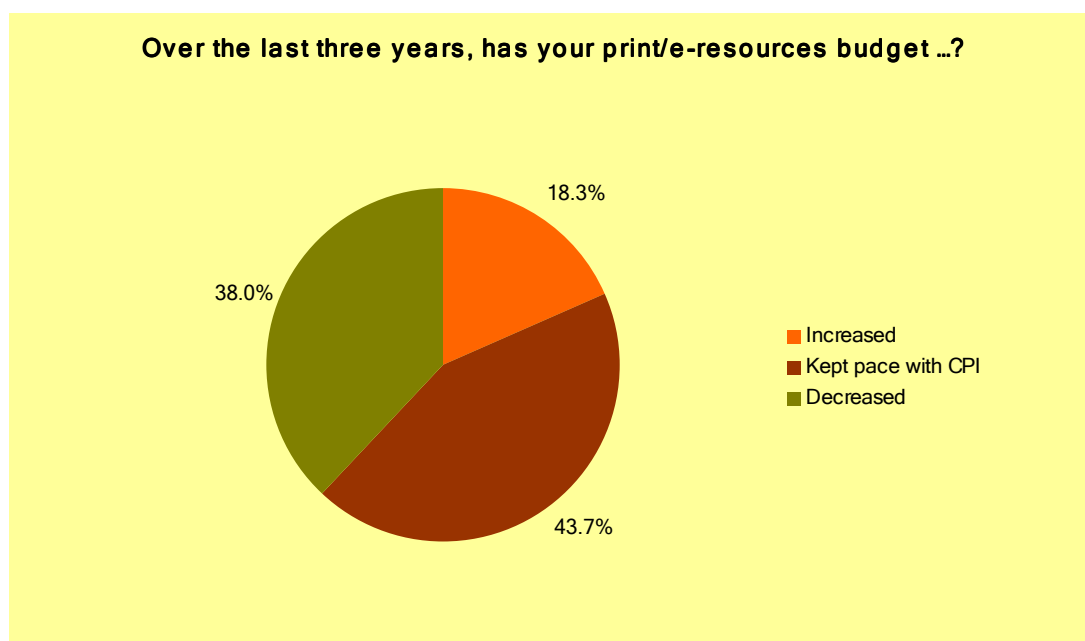
Over the last three years, has your print/e-resources budget …?

18.3%

38.0%

43.7%

- Increased
- Kept pace with CPI
- Decreased

Chart 14

Looking ahead, only 6% of respondents anticipated an increase in their print and e-resources budgets over the next 12 months, while 35% anticipated a decrease (chart 15).
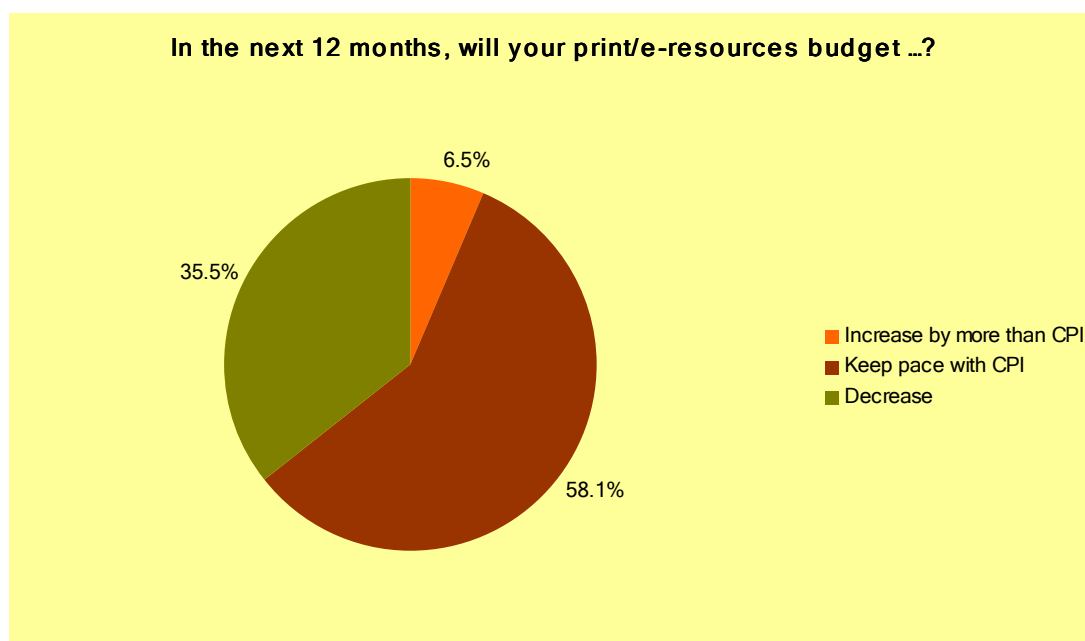
In the next 12 months, will your print/e-resources budget …?

6.5%

35.5%

58.1%

- Increase by more than CPI
- Keep pace with CPI
- Decrease

Chart 15

3.4 Investment in qualified library and information professionals

In 32% of cases, a qualified library and information professional was available for fewer than 20 hours per week (chart 16).
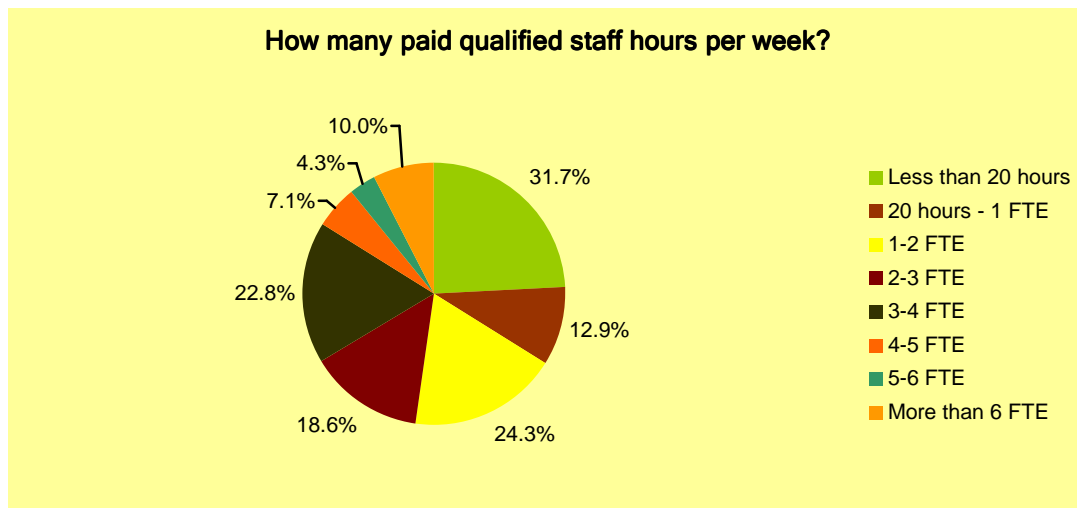
How many paid qualified staff hours per week?

10.0%
4.3%
7.1%
22.8%
18.6%
24.3%
12.9%
31.7%

- Less than 20 hours
- 20 hours - 1 FTE
- 1-2 FTE
- 2-3 FTE
- 3-4 FTE
- 4-5 FTE
- 5-6 FTE
- More than 6 FTE

Chart 16

35% of respondents noted a decrease in the number of qualified staff hours over the last three years (chart 17) and only 7% noted an increase. Where there was an increase, the average was reported to be 7.3 hours per week. Where there was a decrease, the average was reported to be 42 hours per week – more than one full time equivalent (FTE) position.
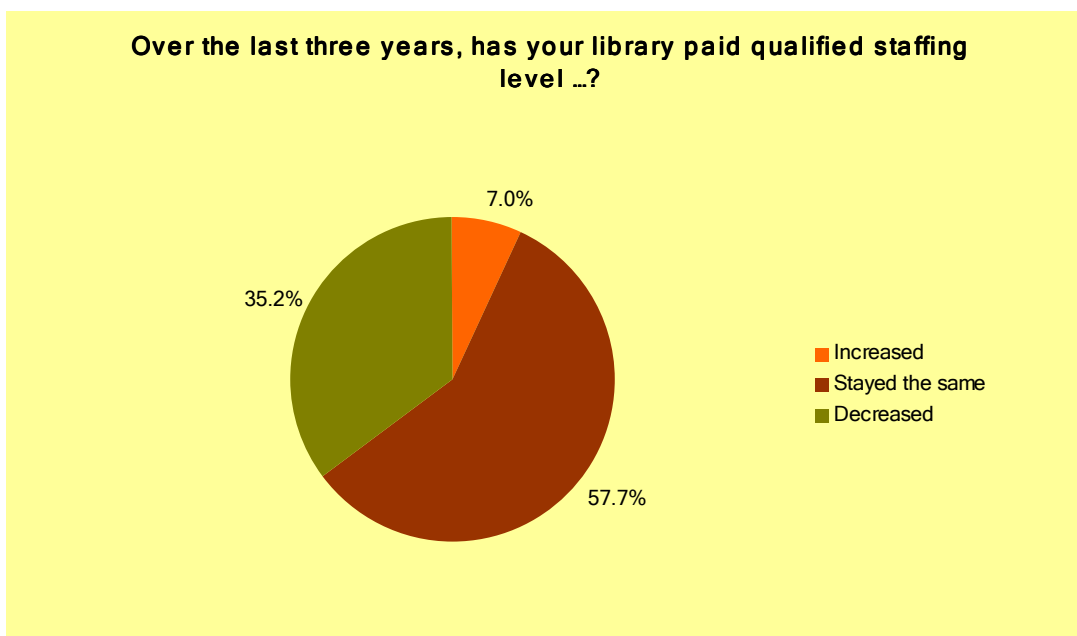
Over the last three years, has your library paid qualified staffing level …?

7.0%
35.2%
57.7%

- Increased
- Stayed the same
- Decreased

Chart 17

Looking ahead, 3% of respondents believe the number of staff hours will increase, while 15% anticipate a decrease (chart 18).

In the next 12 months, will your library staffing …?

3.0%

15.2%

Increase
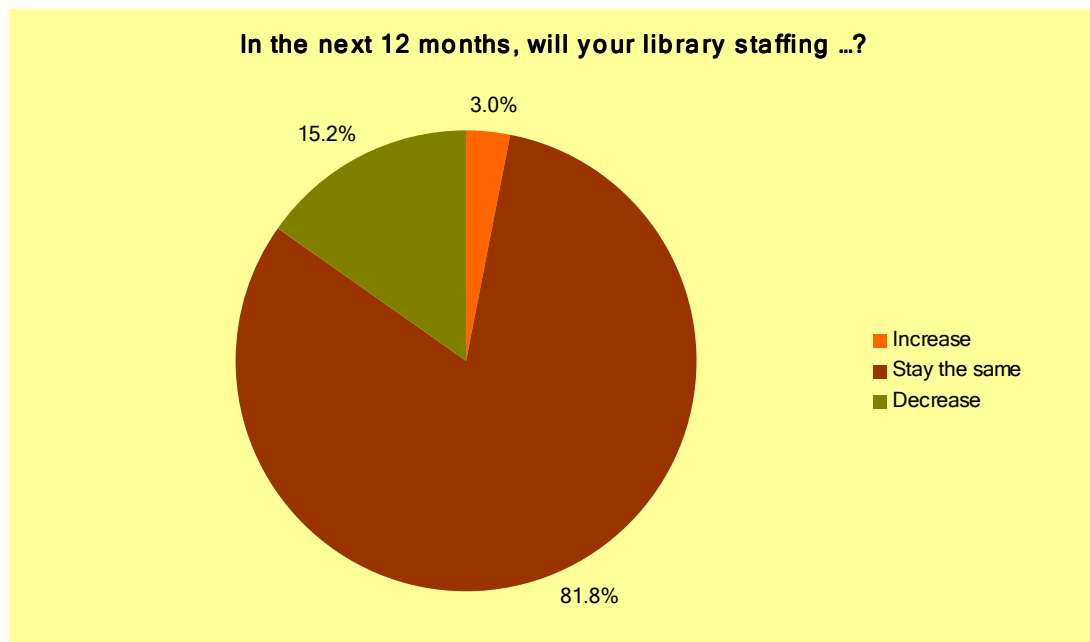Stay the same
Decrease

81.8%

Chart 18

3.5 Investment in library spaces

Some 30% of respondents had experienced a decrease in the library floor area over the last three years, with only 16% reporting an increase (chart 19).
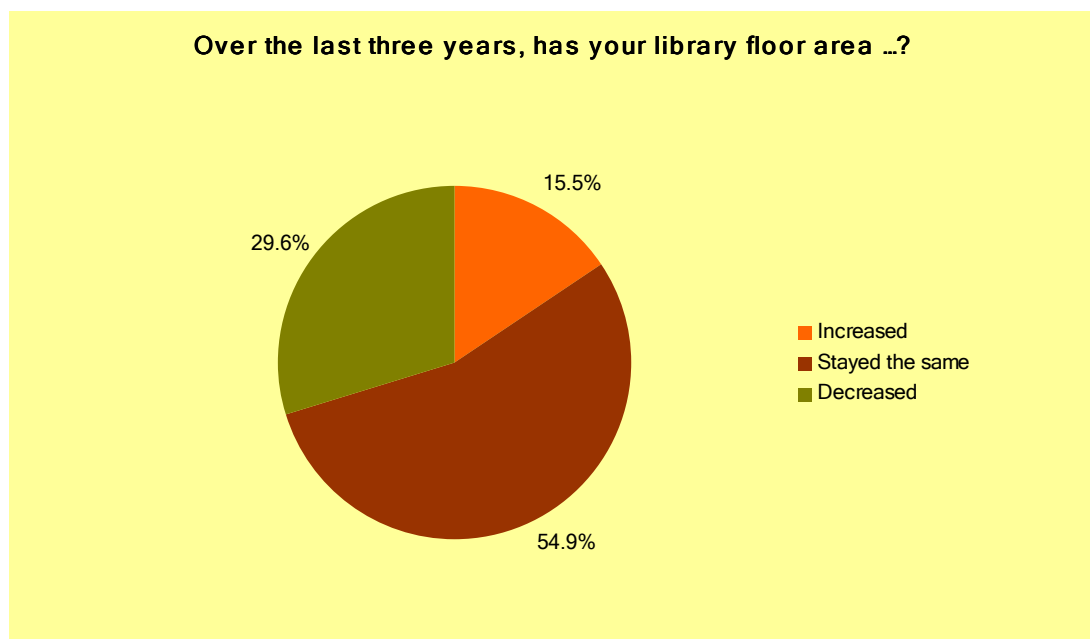
Over the last three years, has your library floor area …?

15.5%

29.6%

Increased
Stayed the same
Decreased

54.9%

Chart 19

Looking ahead, 6% of respondents believe the library space will increase, while 12% anticipate a decrease (chart 20).

In the next 12 months, will your library space …?

- Increase
- Stay the same
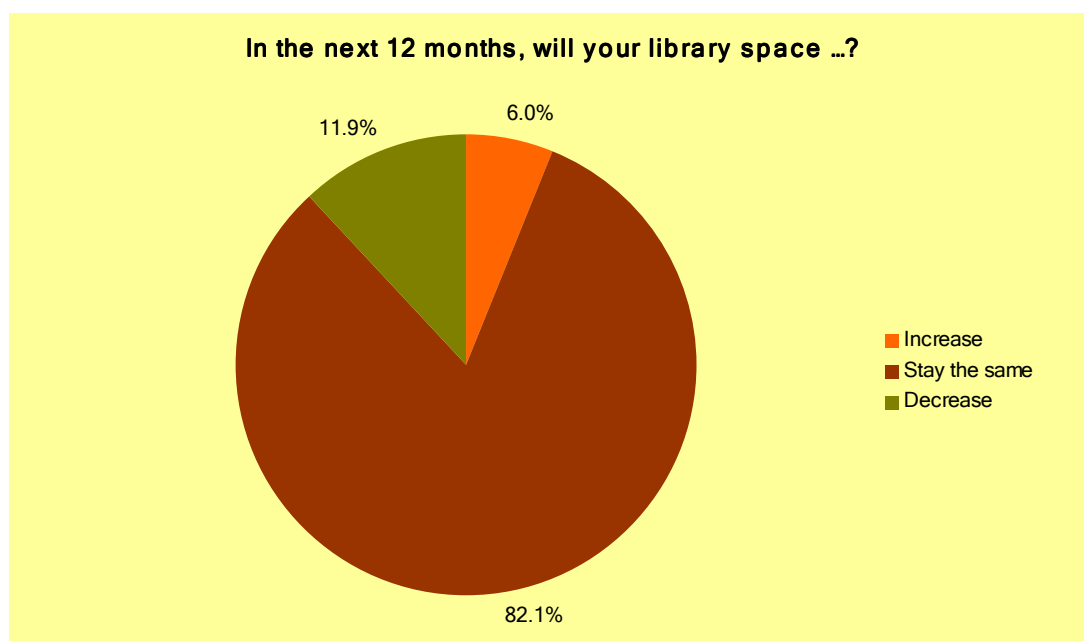- Decrease

6.0%
11.9%
82.1%

Chart 20

3.6 Service levels

The highest number of library and information professionals reported improvement in service levels for the range of electronic resources available (79%), the range of items to borrow (56%), the turnaround time for document delivery (51%), the range of print books (48%), and the turnaround time for literature reviews (31%) – (chart 21).

71% of respondents reported a decrease in the range of print journals; 25% a decrease in the availability of quiet study space, and 25% a decrease in the range of print books.
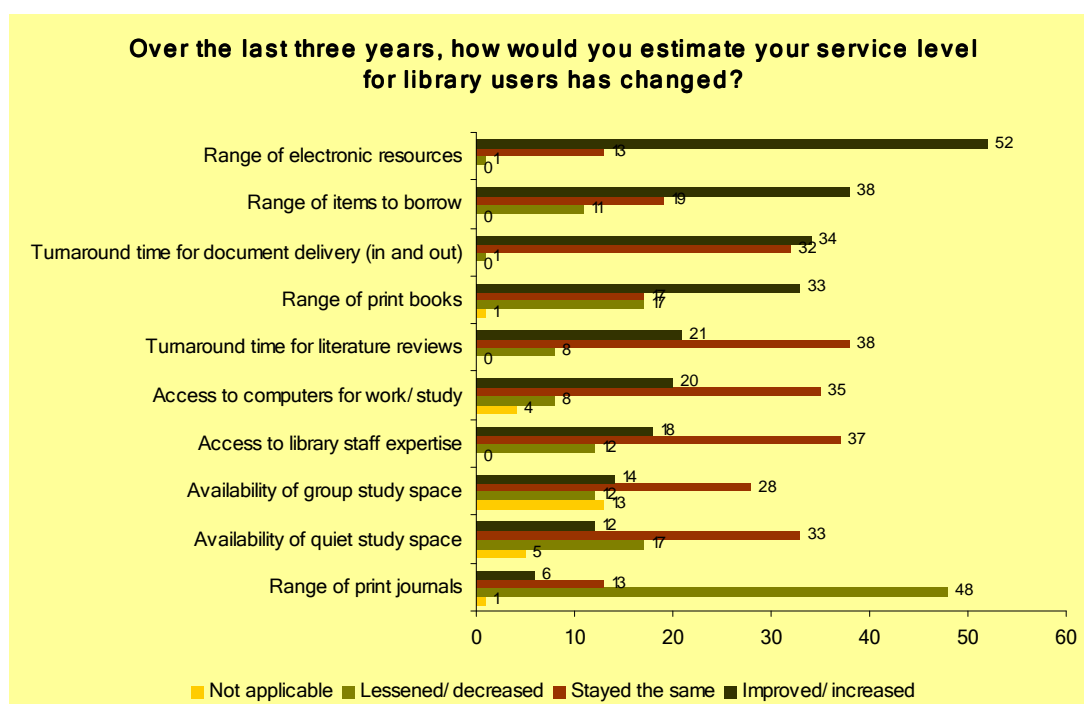
Over the last three years, how would you estimate your service level for library users has changed?

- Not applicable
- Lessened/decreased
- Stayed the same
- Improved/increased

Chart 21

3.7 Future investment

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74%) felt investment in their website was critical, followed by 67% citing e-resources, and 64% more staff hours (chart 22).

There were also mentions of security, IT support, hardware upgrades, new software and training.
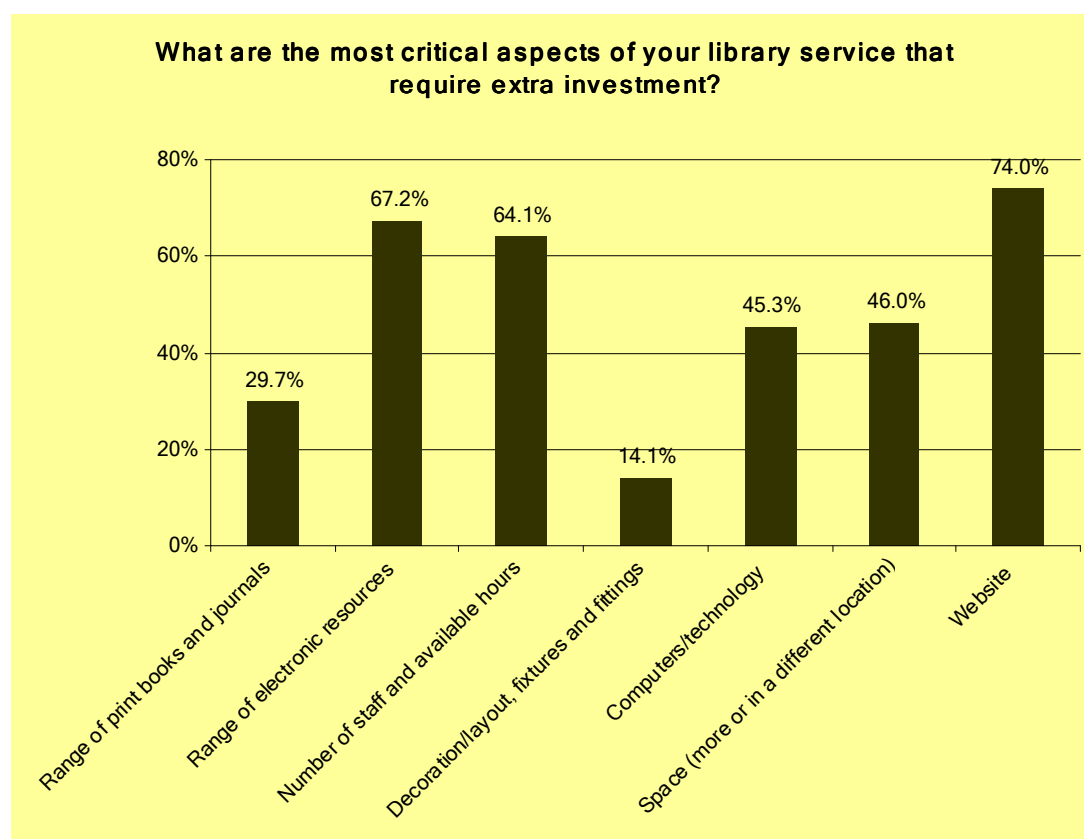
What are the most critical aspects of your library service that require extra investment?

Chart 22

3.8 Issues

Respondents raised a number of issues:

Reduction in staff hours having a detrimental effect on the delivery of services
"We work as closely as we can directly with clinicians, using a clinical librarian model. The staffing reductions have greatly impeded this type of activity, which is deeply regretted by both library staff and clinicians. It is also at odds with the state health service rhetoric of endorsing and promoting evidence based healthcare."

Lack of budget for essential print and e-resources
"I have had to draw on sources outside the library operating budget (educational funding and trust funds) for many years, as we would have hardly any online resources if I didn't."

Visibility of the service in the digital environment
"Even though we use library branding, I don't think some staff realise we are providing their access and how much work and skill is involved in selecting, negotiating and organising e-resources."

Continuing need for print collections
"There is still a preference for print resources, especially books, even when ebooks are available. This preference is not limited to the 'older generation'."

Uncertainty about the future
"In a dynamic environment, circumstances change from month to month."

Lack of understanding of the value of the service at senior level
"Executive staff have little understanding of library work loads and contribution to the organisation, despite some use of the library services. Most of our customers at the normal level are very pleased with the service."

Respondents also mentioned the usage of their service by people outside their organisation and registered user base, for example through distribution of a daily email news digest and free use of the online catalogue.

APPENDIX 1 Health library user survey questions

1. How would you describe yourself?
- Doctor/surgeon
- Nurse/midwife
- Medical student
- Scientist/researcher
- Allied health professional
- Other

2. How have you used the library service at this hospital/institute over the past year?
- Borrow items
- Read/use books
- Read/use print journals
- Use electronic resources
- Use computers for work/study
- Check email
- Contact with a librarian
- Document delivery
- Literature review by library staff
- Quiet study
- Group study
- Photocopying
- Training

3. What have been your information needs over the last year?
- Information relating to patient care
- Personal research
- Professional development-related
- Personal interest
- Service development and planning
- Teaching/supervision
- Audit
- Legal or ethical issues
- Funded research
- Other

4. Have you asked your library/information professional to carry out the information search for you?
- Every time
- Most times
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

5. What benefits do you gain from the assistance of your library/information professional?
- Professional help improves the quantity of information
- Professional help improves the quality of information
- Professional help saves time

6. How do you believe your use of the library service – the print books, journals, databases, document delivery, library staff assistance – over the last year has helped?

- It has helped me progress my studies
- It has helped me achieve higher marks in my exams
- It has helped me keep abreast of the latest clinical developments
- It has helped me improve the health outcomes for my patients
- It has helped me progress my research
- It has helped me discover new and valuable information
- It has helped me confirm my diagnosis and/or treatment plan
- It has changed my thinking and improvement my diagnosis and/or treatment plan

7. How satisfied are you with the library service?

- Range of printed books
- Range of print journals
- Range of electronic resources
- Library space
- Computers in the library
- Library website
- Library staff
- Document delivery service
- Literature review service

8. Are there any other ways in which your library and information service could help you?

9. Any other comments?

APPENDIX 2 Library and information professionals' survey questions

1. What type of health library do you work in?
- National organisation
- State or territory organisation
- Public hospital
- Private hospital
- Medical research institute
- Association or special body

2. Where do you work?
- ACT, NSW, NT, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC, WA

3. What is the library?
- A physical and online resource
- An online resource only

4. What is the total number of potential library users in your organisation (all staff, members, students)?

5. Approximately how many library users do you have?

6. Over the last three years, has the number of library users increased, stayed the same or decreased?
- Please quantify the increase by approximate number or percentage
- Please quantify the decrease by approximate number or percentage.

7. Approximately what percentage of your interaction with users is face-to-face, by telephone and electronic (by email)?

8. Over the last three years, has the level of face-to-face interaction?
- Increased significantly (by more than a third)
- Increased (by up to a third)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (by up to a third)
- Decreased significantly (by more than a third)

9. Over the last three years, has the level of telephone interaction?
- Increased significantly (by more than a third)
- Increased (by up to a third)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (by up to a third)
- Decreased significantly (by more than a third)

10. Over the last three years, has the level of electronic interaction?
- Increased significantly (by more than a third)
- Increased (by up to a third)
- Stayed the same
- Decreased (by up to a third)
- Decreased significantly (by more than a third)

11. What is your annual print/e-resources budget?

12. Over the last three years, has your print/e-resources budget increased, kept pace with CPI or decreased?
- Please quantify the increase by approximate dollar value or percentage
- Please quantify the decrease by approximate dollar value or percentage

13. How many paid qualified staff hours per week do you have to run the library?

14. Over the last three years, has your library paid qualified staffing level increased, stayed the same or decreased?
- Please quantify the increase by number of hours
- Please quantify the decrease by number of hours

15. Over the last three years, has your library floor area increased, stayed the same or decreased?

16. Over the last three years, how would you estimate your service level for library users has improved/increased, stayed the same, lessened/decreased?
- Range of items to borrow
- Range of print books
- Range of print journals
- Range of electronic resources
- Access to computers for work/study
- Access to library staff expertise
- Turnaround time for document delivery (in and out)
- Turnaround time for literature reviews
- Availability of quiet study space
- Availability of group study space

17. What are the most critical aspects of your library service that require extra investment?
- Range of print books and journals
- Range of electronic resources
- Number of staff and available hours
- Decoration/layout, fixtures and fittings
- Computers/technology
- Space (more, or in a different location)
- Website (design, content, access/editing permissions)

18. In the next 12 months, will your print/e-resources budget increase by more than CPI, keep pace with CPI, decrease?

19. In the next 12 months, will your library staffing increase, stay the same, decrease?

20. In the next 12 months, will your library space increase, stay the same, decrease?

Respondents were also asked for quotes from library users and for comments about any aspect of their service.