

# Ready to Act:

## Media Literacy and the Role of Australia's Public Libraries

A joint report by ALIA and PressReader



Australian Library and  
Information Association



# Real or -AI?



Public libraries have always been places where people go to find information they can trust. In 2026, that role has never been more important or demanding.

Across Australia, people are asking questions that would have been unthinkable a decade ago. Is this news story real or AI-generated? How do I know if this message from my bank is legitimate? Why are two websites saying different things about the same event? These questions paint the picture of a complex information environment, and public libraries are uniquely positioned to help their communities navigate it.

This report, produced jointly by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and PressReader, explores how public libraries across the country are responding to the need for media literacy.

The central tension revealed in the survey is simple and striking: the vast majority of public libraries consider media literacy important, and while most are “somewhat well equipped” to support it, only a handful feel “very well equipped.” That gap between belief and capacity is the story of the report. It’s also, we believe, the starting point of the conversation on what it will take to harness the potential of public libraries to support a media literate community.

The Parliament of Australia has already identified media literacy as a preferred and complementary [response to misinformation](#), and the Australian Government has committed to developing the country’s first [National Media Literacy Strategy](#). Meanwhile, the [Australian Media Literacy Alliance \(AMLA\)](#) continues to identify what work needs to be done through its annual summits and research partnerships. Public libraries are central to this national effort.

The question then is not whether public libraries should participate in building media literacy. It’s how we can equip them to do it at the scale that their communities need.

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# 340

## Respondents

### METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a national survey of public library staff across Australia, which combined qualitative and quantitative questions. A total of 340 respondents represent libraries of all sizes and geographies, providing a cross-section of the sector.

Where relevant, survey findings are reviewed alongside external research from ALIA, the University of Canberra, AMLA, IFLA and UNESCO to situate the Australian experience within a broader national and international context.

Almost

99

%  
of Australian  
public libraries  
think media  
literacy is  
essential work,

10%

but only 10% say they're  
very well equipped to  
support it

73%

Meanwhile, 73% of  
respondents feel  
somewhat equipped.

In the same vein, 99% consider quality news and diverse perspectives an important part of building media literacy skills, but just over a fifth

# 22%

provide 30 or more news sources.

Major barriers include staff capacity and time pressures, limited funding and gaps in training and confidence — particularly around AI and emerging technology.

This mirrors findings from ALIA and the University of Canberra Snapshot Report, which confirms that, nationally, library professionals feel responsible for media literacy education but are constrained by limited resources.

## SNAPSHOT OF KEY FINDINGS

### TECHNOLOGY, AI AND AN ESCALATING SENSE OF URGENCY

A notable

# 87%

of library professionals identified that AI-generated content and social media have significantly increased the need for media literacy education.

This is driven primarily by misinformation, scams and deepfakes, which have all become prevalent.

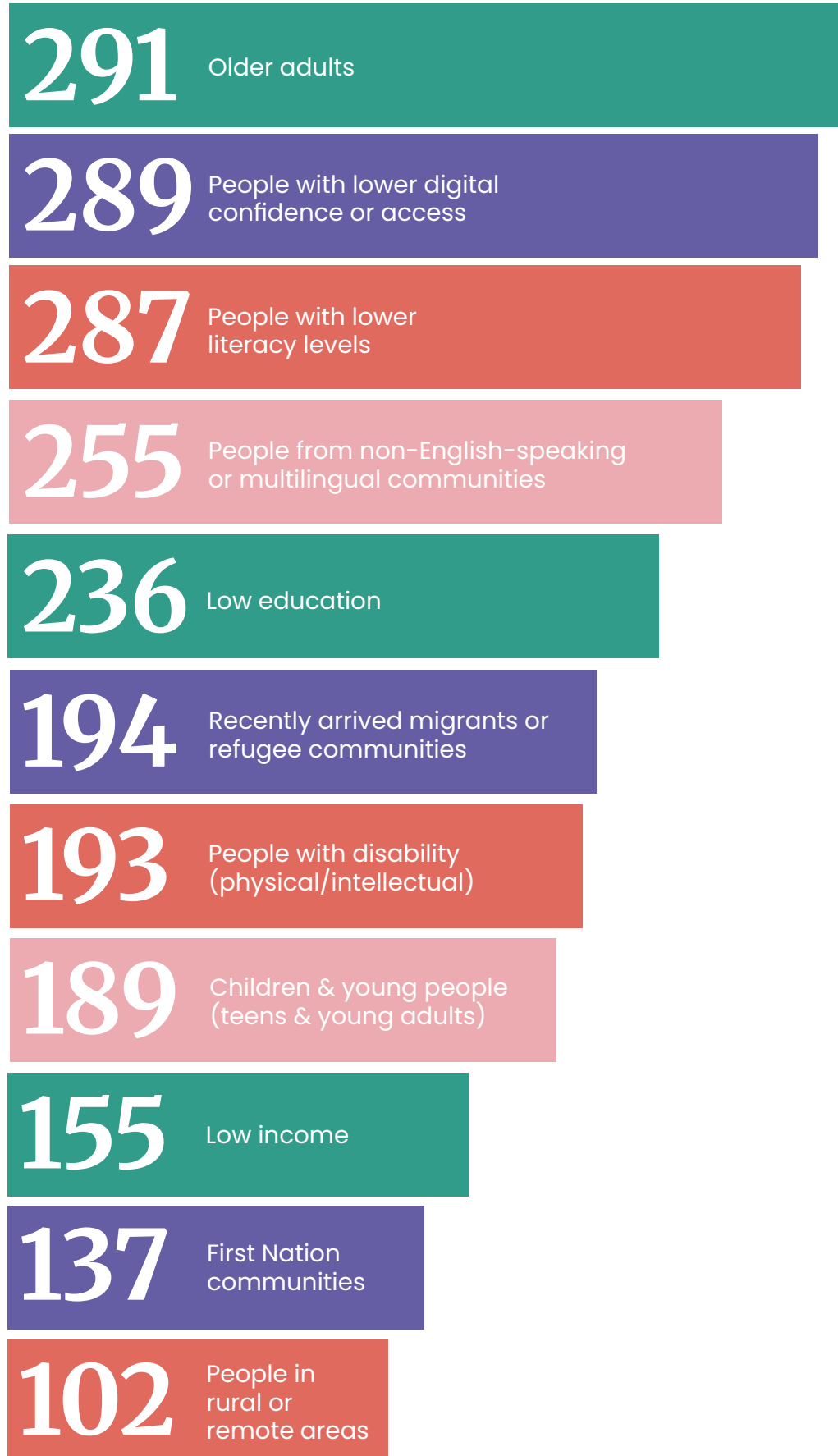
This aligns with [IFLA's 2024 Trend Report](#), which identifies the combination of AI, eroding trust and rising skills complexity as some of the defining challenges of the decade for libraries.

## SNAPSHOT OF KEY FINDINGS

### A COMMUNITY-WIDE MEDIA LITERACY RISK

When asked which community members are most at risk of media literacy challenges, respondents pointed to a wide range of groups. This suggests media literacy is a systemic issue that affects communities across age, income and education levels.

Which groups in your community are most at risk of media literacy challenges?



*The Adult Media  
Literacy in 2024 report*

confirms this. It found that misinformation is a growing concern for Australian adults, and low confidence is particularly prevalent among people on lower incomes, with lower levels of formal education and aged 60 and above.



## WHAT IS

# MEDIA LITERACY?

The [AMLA defines media literacy](#) as the ability to critically engage with media in all aspects of life. Given the expansiveness of this definition, we wanted to hear directly from Australia's librarians on what media literacy means to them. Survey responses revealed three themes that together capture what media literacy means in practice.

The most widespread theme was **critical evaluation**: the ability to analyse media content, question its accuracy and credibility, and assess the reliability of sources. Closely related was a specific concern with **misinformation, disinformation, scams, fake news and AI-generated content**. This suggests that for many library workers, media literacy is an urgent practical concept shaped by the questions patrons are actually asking.

A third recurring theme was **access and navigation**. In other words, these respondents link media literacy with understanding how to use devices, platforms, apps and library systems to find and engage with information in the first place.



## MEDIA LITERACY AS PART OF DIGITAL LITERACY

The third theme is inherently connected to digital literacy, another important area for public libraries.

In fact,

# 76%

of library professionals believe media literacy should be a core part of digital literacy programs. It's no surprise then that [UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy \(MIL\) ecosystem model](#) treats the two as inseparable.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

# THE NATIONAL PICTURE

Public libraries are widely seen as trusted and inclusive institutions, staffed by information professionals who are trained to help people access and assess the information they need. Patrons often come not just for definitive answers but for reassurance, clarification and the confidence to make their own judgements.



This role means that library professionals are on the front lines when it comes to media literacy. With this insight,

# 99

**% of survey respondents believe that media literacy is important,**

**with 60% describing it as extremely important.** They also see it as a widespread issue that impacts everyone, across demographics, income and location.

1 Not at all important

3 Slightly important

20 Moderately important

115 Very important

202 Extremely important

## WHY THIS MATTERS

◀ How important do you believe media literacy is as a public library responsibility?

At the same time, library professionals across the country agree that the growth of AI-generated content on social media has increased the need for media literacy education. The sector clearly sees media literacy as core civic infrastructure. As [educational hubs and trusted community institutions](#), Australia's public libraries have a role to play in upholding that civic infrastructure.

## WHAT ARE AUSTRALIA'S LIBRARIES

# DOING NOW?

The survey leaves little room for ambiguity around how Australia's public library sector views media literacy. However, only 10% of respondents feel they're very well equipped to deliver on their community's media literacy needs, compared to 73% that feel somewhat equipped.

**Despite this gap, many public libraries have already incorporated media literacy efforts into their programming. In the last year, this has included a mix of:**

- ✓ One-to-one assistance at service desks.
- ✓ Workshops and group sessions.
- ✓ Scams and misinformation awareness activities.
- ✓ Support with devices and platforms.
- ✓ Curated collections and digital resources, including news sources, online databases and trusted websites made available through library subscriptions.
- ✓ Community programs delivered in partnership with schools, local organisations and community groups.

**10%**

OF RESPONDENTS FEEL THEY'RE  
VERY WELL EQUIPPED

**73%**

FEEL SOMEWHAT  
EQUIPPED

## BEST PRACTICES IN ACTION:

# HOW TO MAKE THE BIGGEST IMPACT?

When we asked librarians which initiatives have been most successful, three clear patterns emerged. Together, they offer a practical blueprint for libraries looking to strengthen their media literacy work, regardless of their size or budget.

## 1 ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT THAT MEETS PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Libraries consistently describe one-to-one assistance as the most effective way to build media literacy skills, particularly for older adults, patrons with lower digital confidence and those with limited English. This model works because it builds trust, can be paced and personalised to the individual, and allows private conversations about sensitive topics such as scams, misinformation and news credibility. It also creates natural moments to introduce patrons to trusted news sources at the exact point they have a real information need.

Several Australian libraries have formalised this model through structured, bookable appointments with dedicated tech experts. Others pair one-to-one support with regular group programming, such as weekly seniors' technology classes backed by drop-in assistance, recognising that different patrons need different entry points.





## 2 SMALL GROUP SESSIONS GROUNDED IN REAL-WORLD CONTENT

Workshops work best when they focus on practical, current issues (e.g. scams and AI-generated content) rather than abstract concepts. Respondents describe the most successful sessions as ones where participants can compare how different outlets cover the same story, discuss bias and framing using real examples, and learn together in a supportive social environment.

AI in particular is proving to be a strong draw, with some libraries reporting high attendance at AI-focused talks and workshops. Some have gone further, developing dedicated programming around navigating misinformation and disinformation, and training staff to recognise teachable moments inside existing services like Book a Librarian sessions.

### 3 TRUSTED NEWS SOURCES THAT POWER PRACTICAL MEDIA LITERACY CONVERSATIONS

A strong theme across responses is that patrons engage most deeply with media literacy when they can work with credible journalism directly. Libraries report success when they can guide patrons toward professional reporting, help them compare sources across regions and viewpoints, and provide access to digital news they would not otherwise seek out.

The most effective libraries tend to offer a breadth of resources that support different kinds of information needs: quality news alongside research databases such as Gale, Newsbank and Encyclopedia Britannica, library material in multiple formats and targeted support like tech tips for seniors.



## The impetus for media literacy work

Survey responses revealed that media literacy training is often reactive and opportunistic. It's driven by the questions patrons bring, rather than by formal programming. This can be seen as both a strength (it meets people where they are) and a limitation (it can be hard to incorporate on an ad hoc basis with limited budgets and time).

# QUALITY NEWS AND DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

If one-to-one conversations and real-world content are what make media literacy support effective, then libraries need access to trusted, quality journalism. Our survey respondents agree:

# 99%

see access to quality news and diverse perspectives as an important part of developing media literacy skills, with 69% calling it extremely important.

## WHY QUALITY NEWS MATTERS AS A DELIVERY TOOL

When patrons can read how a local paper, a national broadsheet and an international outlet cover the same story, they can better understand abstract concepts like framing and editorial perspective. When they can compare a professionally researched article to a social media post on the same topic, they can identify differences in sourcing, accountability and standards. And when they get regular access to reputable voices, they can build a habit of critically engaging with content.

Research published in the [Journal of Media Literacy Education](#) and more recent work on [public service news and news literacy](#) both reinforce this. Learners are most able to develop practical media literacy skills when they can interact with a variety of real sources that let them compare and evaluate perspectives in context.



# Support media literacy with trusted news from around the world

60+  
languages

120+  
countries

8000+  
publications



Scan to  
book a  
demo



While  
**90%**  
of libraries  
provide some  
quality news  
sources to  
patrons, ▶

**22%**

only 22% provide 30 or more. The geographic spread of those sources tells a similar story.

**66%**

While most libraries provide access to local, regional and national news, only 66% include international news in their catalogue.

Why does this matter? A handful of sources – even high quality ones – cannot show the full picture of how an issue is covered. A climate story impacting New South Wales, reported by an Australian outlet, for example, might be framed completely differently by a global publication or a local paper in the UK. Each piece of reporting would surface different expert voices, biases and regional considerations. Without this comparison, patrons aren't able to get the full picture and develop core media literacy skills.

Having access to several dozen sources also allows libraries to meet the needs of various communities. Multilingual patrons, recently arrived migrants, students researching international topics and readers following issues in specific regions all benefit from breadth that a small core collection cannot deliver. It's the difference between offering media literacy as a concept and offering patrons the tools to practise it meaningfully.

Which geographic perspectives are represented in the news sources your library provides access to?



# OVERCOMING THE CORE BARRIERS TO MEDIA LITERACY

Australian public libraries have made it clear that they have a strong commitment to media literacy. Any limitations they have in their ability to expand that commitment is structural, not motivational.

## WHAT'S STOPPING LIBRARIES FROM TAKING ACTION?

### → STAFF CAPACITY AND TIME

Media literacy support is almost always delivered on top of existing responsibilities. Staff describe limited time for preparation, delivery, follow-up or evaluation. This makes it difficult to sustain or grow programming beyond reactive interactions.

### → FUNDING AND RESOURCING

Tight budgets limit what libraries can do and media literacy is often competing with other core priorities for limited resources. There's often not enough to invest in training, program development, technology and access to high-quality content.

### → TRAINING, CONFIDENCE AND EXPERTISE

Many libraries report that staff lack formal training and feel under-equipped to address fast-moving topics like AI-generated content, misinformation and platform algorithms. The result is hesitation around proactively delivering media literacy programming.

### → RELIANCE ON PATRON-INITIATED ENGAGEMENT

Much of the current model relies on patrons recognising a need and asking for help. This misses the people who may be the most vulnerable to misinformation but don't realise there's a skills gap or don't think of libraries as media literacy educators.

## WHAT LIBRARIES SAY THEY NEED

Asked what additional support would make the biggest difference in their media literacy efforts, respondents pointed consistently to four areas.

### → PRACTICAL AND ROLE-RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Libraries want training that is current, practical and directly applicable to frontline service delivery. Training should be designed to support real conversations with patrons about misinformation, news credibility, AI tools and digital platforms.

### → READY-TO-USE RESOURCES AND CONTENT

Adaptable, ready-made materials (e.g. guides, example activities, discussion prompts, curated content) would reduce preparation time and support more consistent delivery across one-to-one and group settings.

### → ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY JOURNALISM AND DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

Libraries want to point patrons toward credible, professional news from Australia and around the world, with enough breadth to support real comparison and evaluation.

### → PARTNERSHIPS AND SHARED DELIVERY MODELS

Libraries consistently value partnerships with external organisations, community groups and trusted educational providers. They see these partnerships as opportunities to extend capacity and to bring in specialist expertise in areas like scams education, AI awareness and government information.



# MOVING PUBLIC LIBRARIES FROM BELIEF TO ACTION

The findings of this survey describe a sector that is clear about its role and honest about its constraints. Australian public libraries overwhelmingly see media literacy as essential. They're delivering meaningful support where they can, and they're doing so against a backdrop of increasing complexity.

Taken together, these findings point to what would make the biggest difference in an ideal, well supported system: clearer national recognition of the role public libraries play in media literacy, sustained investment in professional development, and high quality, inclusive resources designed for the audiences libraries serve every day.

They also raise broader questions about responsibility. As digital platforms and large technology companies play an increasingly influential role in shaping how information is produced, discovered and distributed, there is a strong case for those organisations to contribute to the public interest work libraries, and other institutions, are already doing to help people navigate today's information landscape with confidence.

While these system level supports continue to evolve, the survey also revealed practical, achievable ways libraries can strengthen their media literacy work right now. Based on what respondents shared about both successful initiatives and ongoing barriers, five practical moves stand out.



## PRACTICAL STEPS

# LIBRARIES CAN TAKE NOW

### 1 Lean into one-to-one moments.

Formalising individualised support — through bookable tech sessions, dedicated appointment slots, or simply training staff to recognise media literacy moments inside existing interactions — creates a repeatable model without requiring new programming.

### 2 Build programming around what patrons are already asking about.

Rather than designing abstract media literacy curricula, libraries can build sessions directly from the questions landing at their service desks each week.



## 4 Partner with relevant institutions where possible.

Libraries consistently identify partnerships as one of the most valuable ways to extend capacity. Local schools, community organisations, scams-awareness programs and specialist providers all bring expertise that complements library strengths. For example, ALIA has provided access to media literacy programs developed by the ABC and the University of Canberra. Plus, shared delivery models mean no single library has to do everything alone.

## 5 Advocate for the support the sector needs.

Professional development, ready-to-use resources and access to quality journalism are the three support needs respondents raised most consistently. Library leaders can use reports, like this one, to make the case to funders, councils and sector bodies.

## 3 Use quality journalism as a teaching tool.

Libraries that provide access to a breadth of trusted news sources can turn that access into active media literacy work. Guide patrons through comparing how different outlets cover the same story, or point them toward international perspectives on local issues.

## A MOMENT OF REAL OPPORTUNITY

The Australian Government's commitment to a National Media Literacy Strategy, combined with ongoing work by ALIA, AMLA and partners across the sector, creates a real opportunity to move from reactive support to a coordinated national response. Public libraries are ready to play their part. This report is an invitation to make sure they have what they need to do it well.



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