ADULT **LEARNING** AUSTRALIA
*Lifelong learning for all Australians*

**Adult Learning Australia Position Paper**

**October 2026**

# Media and Information Literacy – A Lifelong Learning Issue

**Global Media and Information Literacy Week | 24–31 October 2026**

*Theme: We All Play a Part – Media and Information Literacy for the People*

# Executive summary

Increasingly, media and information literacy is an essential lifelong learning capability. It enables people to evaluate information, recognise misinformation, engage with digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI), and participate confidently in their communities and democracy.

Recent research highlights both the need for adult media literacy education and strong public support for it. The *Adult Media Literacy in 2024: Australian Attitudes, Experiences and Needs* report found that while 68% of Australian adults had heard of media literacy, only 33% had some understanding of the term. Importantly, 82% supported media literacy programs being available for adults. Separately, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) reported that 72% of Australian adults using digital platforms believed they had encountered misinformation in the first half of 2025, while 74% of Australian adults expressed concern about online misinformation.

Media literacy is not just an issue for school curriculums. Adults need accessible opportunities to develop and refresh these skills throughout life, particularly as digital platforms and AI profoundly and rapidly transform how information is created and shared. Adult and community education (ACE) providers are well placed to support this learning through practical, inclusive and community-based programs that reach people where they live, or who may face barriers to formal education or online training.

During Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2026, Adult Learning Australia (ALA) calls for Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy to take a whole-of-life approach and prioritise opportunities for adult learning as an essential part of the national response.

ALA recommends that the strategy:

- Recognise media and information literacy as a lifelong learning priority.
- Elevate the ACE sector as a key delivery partner.
- Assess and address the needs of adults with lower literacy, numeracy and digital skills.
- Expand practical learning about AI, misinformation and evaluating information across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australian communities.
- Invest in partnerships, accessible resources, educator professional development and evaluation.
- Consult Adult Learning Australia and the wider ACE sector during the strategy's development, including through stakeholder consultations or a dedicated roundtable.

ALA brings almost 70 years of experience in adult and community education and a national network of adult learning providers. Involving ALA and the ACE sector will ensure the strategy reflects the needs and priorities of adult learners, and supports accessible and high-impact media and information literacy education across Australia.

# Our position

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) believes media and information literacy is an essential lifelong learning capability. More than ever before, all adults need the skills and confidence to critically evaluate information, recognise misinformation, engage with digital technologies and participate meaningfully in their communities and democracy.

Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy is a crucial opportunity to recognise adult learning as an essential part of a whole-of-life approach to media literacy. ALA calls for adult and community education (ACE) to be recognised as a key partner in building media and information literacy across Australia.

ALA also calls for Adult Learning Australia and the wider ACE sector to be consulted during the development of the National Media Literacy Strategy, ensuring that the experiences and needs of adult learners inform the national approach.

# Why media and information literacy matters

Global Media and Information Literacy Week, led by UNESCO, focuses on the shared responsibility of governments, educators, researchers, media, communities and individuals in building a stronger information environment.

The 2026 theme, *We All Play a Part – Media and Information Literacy for the People*, highlights that everyone needs the skills to navigate an information landscape increasingly shaped by digital platforms, artificial intelligence (AI) and information overload.

Media and information literacy involves more than identifying false information. It includes understanding how media and information are produced and shared, evaluating sources, identifying bias, interpreting evidence, understanding the influence of technology and participating responsibly in online and offline communities.

These capabilities are increasingly important for the health and resilience of individuals, families and our community, including accessing services, maintaining social connections, making informed decisions, participating in civic life and engaging with diverse perspectives.

# The Australian context

Australian research emphasises the need for a coordinated national approach to media and information literacy, through accessible learning opportunities for adults.

- **74% of Australian adults are concerned about online misinformation.** The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), drawing on the 2025 Digital News Report, reported that Australia had the highest level of concern among the countries surveyed. This measures concern, not people's ability to identify misinformation.
- **72% of Australian adults who used digital platforms believed they had encountered misinformation during the first half of 2025.** ACMA reported that this finding was consistent with the previous year.
- **68% of adults had heard of media literacy, but only 33% had some understanding of the term.** The report *Adult Media Literacy in 2024: Australian Attitudes, Experiences and Needs* found that awareness did not necessarily translate into understanding.
- **82% supported media literacy programs being available for adults.** The same study found strong public support for adult media literacy education, reinforcing the case for accessible learning opportunities throughout life.
- **News literacy education was associated with higher trust in news.** The *Digital News Report Australia 2025*, produced by the University of Canberra's News and Media Research Centre, reported trust in news of 53% among people who had undertaken news literacy education, compared with 41% among those who had not. Only 24% of respondents reported having received news literacy education.

These findings show that while Australians use digital media regularly, many lack confidence in their abilities. They also document a clear need for more educational resources and support, including opportunities for adults to develop skills to identify misinformation, respond to online harms and understand emerging technologies.

AI and digital platforms are swiftly changing how information is created, distributed and consumed, and transforming the digital ways in which Australians engage with each other.

All Australians urgently need the skills and confidence to understand AI-generated content, assess the credibility of information and make informed judgements about what they read, watch and share.

Together, these findings demonstrate both the need for accessible media literacy education throughout adulthood and strong public support for it. Such opportunities are particularly important for people with lower literacy, numeracy or digital skills, who may face additional barriers to accessing and evaluating information.

# Adult learning has an important role to play

Adults also need opportunities to develop, use and refresh media literacy skills throughout their lives.

With almost 70 years of experience in adult and community education, ALA brings expertise in foundation skills, digital literacy, critical thinking and lifelong learning. As the national peak body for ACE, ALA connects with a diverse network of adult learning providers.

Community-based adult education can help people develop practical skills in familiar and accessible learning environments. ACE providers include community centres, neighbourhood houses, more than 200 Learn Local providers in Victoria, First Nations organisations, community colleges and other not-for-profit organisations. They also include libraries, learning cities, TAFEs and local governments supporting adult learning.

These settings can reach people who may have had limited access to formal education or who experience barriers to participating in online or formal training.

ALA believes that ACE can contribute to media and information literacy in five key ways.

## 1. Supporting critical thinking and foundational skills

Literacy, numeracy and critical thinking help people interpret statistics, assess evidence, recognise and reject misleading claims, compare sources and distinguish fact from opinion.

## 2. Building confidence in the digital environment

Practical learning can help adults understand social media, online news, algorithms, AI-generated content, privacy and the changing ways information is shared.

## 3. Promoting inclusion and equitable access

Learning opportunities need to be accessible to people with different literacy levels, language backgrounds, digital skills, abilities and experiences. This includes people who may be particularly vulnerable to digital exclusion or misinformation.

### 4. Strengthening community connection and democratic participation

Media literacy can help people engage responsibly with different perspectives, participate in informed discussions and make decisions about issues affecting their families and communities.

### 5. Supporting learning throughout life

People's information needs change as technologies, services and social environments change. Media literacy education should be available at different stages of adulthood, not limited to a single course or point in time.

## International and policy context

UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning advocates for dedicated media and information literacy training for adult educators, reflecting the importance of integrating these skills into adult learning.

Media and information literacy also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals:

- **SDG 4: Quality Education.** Targets 4.6 and 4.7 support adult literacy and numeracy and the knowledge and skills needed for sustainable development, global citizenship, human rights and cultural diversity.
- **SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.** Target 16.10 addresses public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Media literacy supports informed participation in democratic life.
- **SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities.** Inclusive media literacy education can help address unequal access to information, knowledge and digital participation.
- **SDG 5: Gender Equality.** Media literacy can help people recognise and challenge gender stereotypes, discrimination and hate in media and digital spaces.

## Recommendations for Australia's National Media Literacy Strategy

On 3 June 2026, the Australian Government announced that Whereto Research, in partnership with the University of Melbourne, would co-design Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy. The strategy will consider issues including emerging technologies, how Australians identify trustworthy information, and the needs of groups requiring targeted support.

ALA recommends that the strategy:

## 1. Recognise media and information literacy as a lifelong learning priority

Include adults of all ages in the strategy, recognising that media literacy skills need to be developed and refreshed throughout life.

## 2. Elevate adult and community education as a key delivery partner

Acknowledge the high-impact role and experience of ACE providers in delivering accessible, practical and community-based learning, particularly for adults who may not engage with formal education or online training.

## 3. Address the needs of adults with lower foundation skills

Ensure the strategy considers literacy, numeracy, language, accessibility and digital inclusion, with targeted support for groups facing additional barriers.

## 4. Support practical learning about AI and the changing information environment

Promote learning opportunities that help adults evaluate sources, interpret information, understand AI-generated content, reject misinformation and make informed decisions online.

## 5. Support partnerships, resources and evaluation

Encourage collaboration between governments, education providers, libraries, community organisations, researchers and media organisations. Support accessible learning resources, professional development for educators and evaluation of what works for different adult learners.

## 6. Consult Adult Learning Australia and the wider ACE sector

Engage sector experts such as ALA in the development of the National Media Literacy Strategy through stakeholder consultations, a roundtable or other opportunities to provide input. As the national peak body with almost 70 years of sector experience and leadership, ALA can contribute sector evidence, practitioner insights and connections to adult learning providers and its broader membership network.

# Conclusion

Media and information literacy is essential to lifelong learning, digital inclusion, social cohesion and democratic participation. As the information environment changes, adults need accessible opportunities to develop the skills and confidence to evaluate information, understand different perspectives and participate meaningfully in society.

Australia now has a vital opportunity to translate these principles into a coordinated national approach that supports learning for Australians of all ages.

Adult and community education is well placed to support this work through trusted community settings and practical learning opportunities.

During Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2026, ALA calls for Australia's National Media Literacy Strategy to adopt a whole-of-life approach and recognise adult learning as an essential part of the national response.

ALA recommends that Whereto Research and the University of Melbourne consult Adult Learning Australia, as the national peak body for ACE during the strategy's development, ensuring that the experiences and needs of adult learners and the contribution of the ACE sector are represented.

# References and further reading

## Australian research and policy


- Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). (2025). Majority of Australians encountering misinformation online. 24 November 2025.
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- University of Melbourne. (2026). University of Melbourne researchers to help shape Australia's first National Media Literacy Strategy. 3 June 2026.

## International resources

- UNESCO. (2026). Global Media and Information Literacy Week 2026: We All Play a Part – Media and Information Literacy for the People.
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