



Learning changes lives
2018 YEAR OF LIFELONG LEARNING

**Pre-budget submission
2018–19**



**Adult
Learning
Australia**

About ALA

Adult Learning Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the Australian Government's 2018–2019 Budget.

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) is the national peak body for adult and community education (ACE). We are a not-for-profit entity with both organisational and individual members in all states and territories who reflect the diversity of adult and community education.

The learner is the central focus of our attention. We believe that learning occurs through informal and non-formal means, as well as through the formal education and training systems.

In 2018, ALA celebrates its 58th anniversary.

Executive summary

National Year of Lifelong Learning.

Our vision is for lifelong and lifewide learning for all Australians.

Taking time to learn as an adult is the key to a healthy and active life, to staying connected in communities, to finding new or better work and participating in a democracy. Learning changes people's lives for the better. It's a lifechanger.

In the Year of Lifelong Learning, Adult Learning Australia is calling on the Australian Government to adopt a formal policy on lifelong learning as an essential feature of a healthy, active democracy. We believe that providing access to lifelong learning opportunities allows people to overcome barriers and change their lives for the better.

We are also calling for the reinstatement of funding support for Adult Learning Australia to provide professional development, research and support to the ACE sector.

There is currently no single data source available on all of the work that Australian ACE does. Government must recognise the important role of ACE providers in the education and training system and its contribution to wider health and wellbeing outcomes by prioritising opportunities for ALA and partners to access funding to continue to support, research and develop the sector.

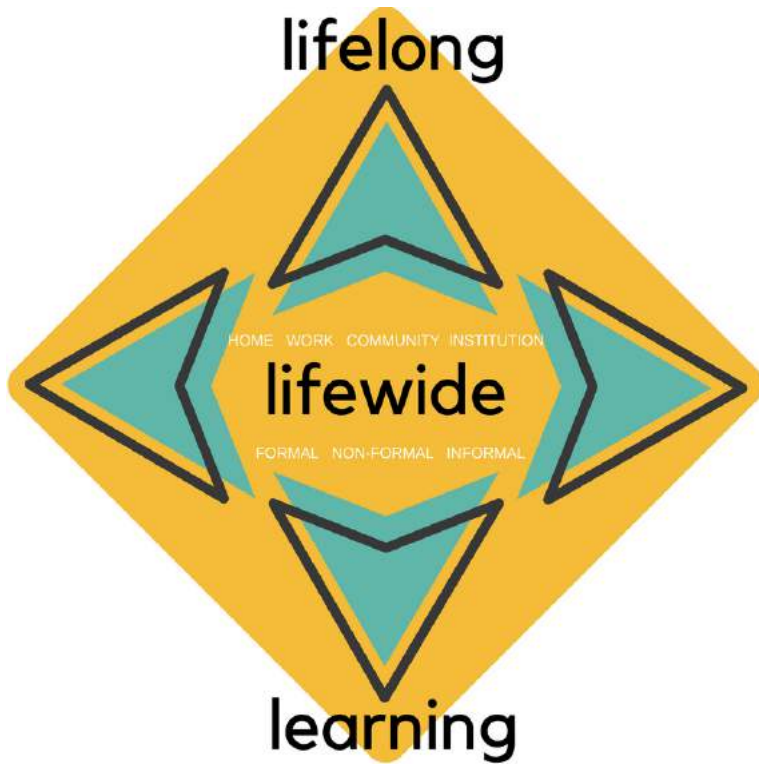
Lifelong learning recognises that learning occurs continuously throughout life. It helps people deal with new challenges and respond to ever-changing cultural, social and economic circumstances by developing their skills, knowledge and capacity to think critically.

Lifewide learning recognises that learning can occur simultaneously in all learning contexts (home, community, workplaces and institutions) and different learning settings (formal, non-formal and informal).

Lifelong and lifewide learning provides a framework that supports people to:

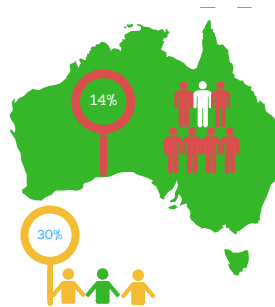
- reach their potential
- better anticipate transitions
- self-manage their health and wellbeing.

Resilient and inclusive communities are nourished by a culture of lifelong learning, which enables them to live more productively in a diverse, multicultural society; enjoy the full benefits of citizenship and solve complex social and economic problems.



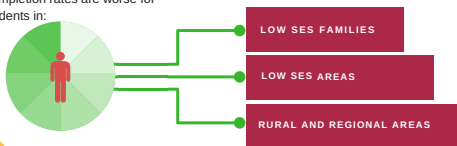
WHY WE NEED LIFELONG LEARNING

1 in 7 Australians (14%) have very poor literacy skills



1 in 3 (30%) have literacy skills that makes them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion

1 in 8 (12.5%) Australians students do not finish Year 12. Completion rates are worse for students in:



The digital divide excludes people from the benefits of the digital economy – especially older people

Health, education and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians continue to be worse than for non-Indigenous people

36%

36% of people with a disability aged 18–64 years have completed Year 12, compared with 60% for those without a disability.

20%

1 in 5 (20%) of Australians aged between 16–85 will experience a mental health condition.

High levels of psychological distress are associated with lower income, lower educational attainment and unemployment.

Adult and community education

Adult and community education must be formally recognised in public policy for its role in providing accessible learning opportunities for adults in local communities that meets their needs and supports place-based community development.

Adult and community education (ACE) is a discrete fourth sector of education in Australia that is not for profit and community based. Research shows that ACE providers offer a platform for disengaged and/or disadvantaged adults to:

- transition back into learning
- develop basic skills for work
- improve language, literacy and numeracy
- pathway into formal learning programs.

There are at least 2500 ACE providers in Australia, all of which provide personal enrichment learning. Many provide adult basic education in language, literacy, numeracy and other foundation skills.

ACE programs build community capacity, enhance social cohesion and promote health and wellbeing. They foster skill development and provide vocationally focussed education and training programs and pathways. ACE enables inclusive learning by recognising that there is a broad spectrum of learners with individual needs and preferences. ACE learning programs are highly focussed and offered in a friendly, flexible and supportive environment.

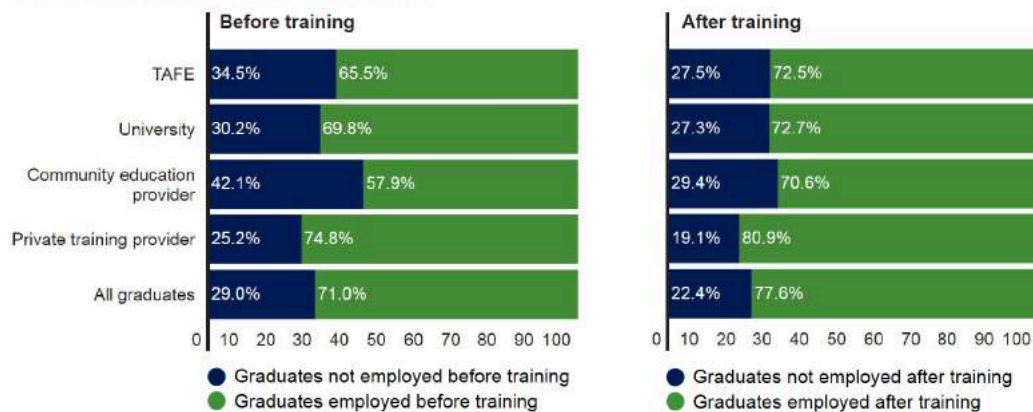
ACE organisations also play a significant role in vocational educational training (VET) for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds or for people facing multiple barriers to learning. Between 8–9 per cent of VET is provided through community based adult education providers in Australia¹.

NCVER 2016 data² results indicate that community providers have greater success rates for graduates attaining employment status after training with a community provider than all other providers, with an approx. 13 per cent increase compared to TAFE (7 per cent), private (approx. 6 per cent) and University (approx. 3 per cent).

¹ (https://www.ncver.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/58971/2871-VET-provider-market-structures.pdf)

² <http://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A74585>

Employment status by VET provider type



However, ACE continues to be marginalised in terms of policy and resources despite its recognised ability to provide a range of lifelong learning opportunities that are both accessible and inclusive.

Recommendations

ALA is calling for:

- formal recognition of ACE as a discrete fourth sector of education in Australia, offering accessible learning opportunities for adults in local communities that meet their needs and support place-based community development
- a renewed Ministerial Declaration on ACE
- recognition of the role played by ACE providers in attracting and supporting key equity groups through the provision of community service obligation funding
- specific and complementary roles for not for profit community providers, the public TAFE system and for profit providers
- pathways and foundation skills funding primarily offered to ACE and TAFE providers
- funding support for Adult Learning Australia to provide professional development and support to the ACE sector and to continue to coordinate Adult Learners' Week annually
- funding support for Adult Learning Australia to research the role of ACE social enterprises in tackling social issues and supporting sustainability.

Resources and research

- [Fact sheets](#)
- [ACE environmental scan](#)
- [ACE in rural and regional Australia](#)
- [ACE infographics](#)
- [Disengaged youth and ACE](#)
- [The ageing population: What are the implications for ACE?](#)
- [The role of ACE in support equitable mental health reform](#)
- [2008 Ministerial Declaration on ACE](#)

Adult language, literacy and numeracy

The right to literacy is an inherent part of the right to an education. All adult Australians, regardless of their employment or social status, should be supported to fully develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Modern workplaces require workers with high levels of language, literacy and numeracy, and the capacity to problem solve in technology-rich environments.

Results from the Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey found that around 1 in 7 Australians (14%) have very poor literacy skills and 1 in 3 (30%) Australians have literacy skills low enough to make them vulnerable to unemployment and social exclusion (refer policy 4).

Today Australians need proficiency in complex modes of communication and high levels of digital literacy. A lack of language, literacy and numeracy impacts all aspects of an adult's life and has intergenerational effects on families, children and communities.

In order to compete in the global knowledge-based economy and to maintain the level of prosperity and social cohesion that Australians need and expect, the language, literacy and numeracy levels of the adult population must be at the forefront of public policy.

Recommendations

ALA is calling for:

- recognition of the contribution of non-accredited language, literacy and numeracy courses for both personal development and social capital through funding support
- opportunities for adults with barriers to learning to develop their language, literacy and numeracy skills to build their confidence and contribute to our diverse and changing society and economy
- investment in a national family literacy strategy focussed on socially and economically marginalised Australian communities and schools with large numbers of Indigenous students
- a funded workplace English language, literacy and numeracy program that addresses workforce LLN requirements
- funded ACE environments that support adults with low digital and health literacy.

Resources

- [Fact sheets](#)
- [Let's get serious about adult literacy and numeracy](#)
- [Language, literacy and numeracy network](#)

- **Policy links**
- [National Foundation Skills Strategy for Adults](#)
- [Indigenous Advancement Strategy](#)

Lifelong learning communities

Resilient and equitable lifelong learning communities must be developed to meet the learning demands of the modern workplace and society; improve productivity and realise the full potential of everyone in our communities.

According to the OECD, lifelong learning is about creating ‘a society of individuals who are motivated to continue learning throughout their lives – both formally and informally’. But there are big challenges in terms of equity particularly where an individual’s motivation or ability to learn is impacted by social, cultural or economic circumstances.

Technology has already transformed the workplace and society and will continue to do so in ways we don’t yet understand. Lifelong learning is now necessary for people to adapt to change and build the skills and knowledge they need to live rich and fulfilling lives. Adults without access to lifelong learning opportunities are at risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion.

Lifelong learning communities embed a culture of learning and strengthen pathways to further learning and wellbeing through collaboration, engagement and advocacy.

Lifelong learning communities promote learning as an activity that can take place anywhere not just in formal learning settings. Lifelong learning communities mobilise their resources to foster a culture of empowerment, social inclusion, prosperity and sustainability through learning.

Lifelong learning communities are committed to:

- offering opportunities for learning throughout life
- meeting the learning needs of individuals
- developing engaged, flexible and adaptable learners
- providing systems of support and improvement
- improving community infrastructure to meet these goals.

Recommendations

ALA is calling for:

- a [formal lifelong learning policy](#) that acknowledges learning beyond employment and re-skilling, and highlights its role in social mobility, community building and wellbeing
- a [formal lifelong learning policy](#) that highlights the role of the ACE sector in meeting key equity objectives of lifelong learning in Australia
- support for community learning initiatives particularly in areas with high populations of disadvantaged adults, in collaboration with local government, ACE organisations, libraries, ALA and other related community organisations

- a community learning centre in every regional, rural and remote Australian town without access to a TAFE or University campus
- funded lifelong adult learning programs delivered in ACE settings on important areas of public debate such as the digital divide, moving to a lower carbon future, immigration, multiculturalism and positive ageing
- demographic, geographic, social and economic research on the role of adult and community education in building lifelong learning communities.

Resources and research

- [Fact sheets](#)
- [Adult learning and civic participation](#)
- [Rethinking community based learning](#)

Policy link

- [Department of Education and Training Corporate Plan 2015–2019](#)

Inclusive learning culture

All adult Australians must have access to learning environments that embrace an inclusive learning culture, which means valuing and respecting difference and empowering them to reach their full potential.

Research shows us that people who disengage from education are disproportionately disadvantaged. Currently 1 in 8 Australian students do not finish Year 12, and completion rates are worse for low socioeconomic status (SES) students in low SES communities. This places them at higher risk of being disengaged from full-time work, study or training for most of their lives.

In rural and regional areas, students have less access than their urban counterparts to education services. They are less likely to complete Year 12; less likely to go to university and more likely to drop out if they enrol.

There has been some improvement in terms of the Closing the Gap education targets for Indigenous people but the data is not disaggregated, which can effectively mask issues particularly in regional and remote locations.

Health, education and employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians continue to be worse than for non-Indigenous people. There is a close association between low levels of education and incarceration for Indigenous Australians. In fact, there are serious gaps between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the population in terms of incarceration, death by suicide, substance abuse and mental health.

High levels of psychological distress are associated with lower income, lower educational attainment and unemployment. Each year, 1 in 5 (20%) of Australians aged between 16 and 85 will experience a mental health condition. The economic cost of mental health conditions to Australia is significant, with estimates ranging up to \$40 billion a year.

Australians with a disability are more likely to be unemployed compared to those without a disability (10.0% compared with 5.3%). 36% of people with a disability aged 18–64 years have completed Year 12, compared with 60% for those without a disability. 45% of people with a disability in Australia are living either near or below the poverty line. This is more than double the OECD average of 22%.

Older Australians continue to miss out on the benefits of the digital economy and Internet tools that could help them manage their lives better and support them to overcome some of the physical, psychological and social barriers that accompany ageing. While the digital divide is narrowing in Australia, divisions persist for those who also experience other forms of social inequity, including vulnerable older people, who are poor, unemployed, have low educational attainment, have a disability, are Indigenous, were born in non-English speaking countries and/or live in rural and regional areas.

Learning empowers people. It offers strong social returns in productivity, community participation, political awareness and active citizenry. In a rapidly changing society, with technological advances and growing inequalities, adults must have the opportunity to gain and build their skills and knowledge in order to make informed choices and improve their lives.

Research shows that inclusive learning environments need:

- strategic outreach
- ongoing engagement
- tailored support
- a flexible learning environment.

Recommendations

ALA is calling for:

- funded youth learning programs that encourage aspiration and agency
- strategies that link people with community-based, flexible and high quality education, training and pathways to employment
- funded adult learning programs that are accessible to people with mental health conditions and/or people with physical disabilities
- incorporate adult and community education into mental health and disability programs as an integral part of community health, rather than as an external programs
- funded adult education programs for older Australians that encourage productive ageing
- infrastructure funding for local sites of adult learning practice in Indigenous communities such as youth media centres, neighbourhood houses or community learning centres
- funded ACE formal and non-formal education and training programs for offenders on community based orders.

Resources and research

- [Fact sheets](#)
- [ACE in rural and regional Australia](#)
- [Disengaged youth and ACE](#)
- [Learning and civic participation](#)
- [The ageing population: What are the implications for ACE](#)
- [The role of ACE in support equitable mental health reform?](#)

Policy links

- Closing the gap
- Strengthen mental health care
- NDIS

Education for sustainable development

Public policy must support the development of a skilled population who can make judicious and well-informed decisions about sustainability in their homes, communities, workplaces and leisure activities.

There are complex challenges to our environmental systems that support all life on our planet. Education for sustainable development is about incorporating environmental challenges into learning processes. It requires a strong focus on:

- Creating a sustainable future
- Citizen and participatory action
- Awareness raising and reflection
- Influencing decision-makers.

Education for sustainable development is about developing the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to take action responsibly. It is about understanding the impact of what we do today on humanity and the planet in the future.

Education for sustainability uses a framework of lifelong learning for everyone, at different life stages and in learning contexts.

This means developing the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to participate in decisions about the way we do things, locally and globally, to improve quality of life without damaging the planet.

Sustainability also involves working towards alleviating poverty, upholding human rights and committing to equity in all forms of education – formal, non-formal and informal.

Educating for sustainability means offering adult learning programs that are:

- relevant at a local level
- culturally appropriate
- learner-centred
- collaborative
- participatory
- self-sustaining.

It also means promoting opportunities for creative and critical thinking that are both empowering and supportive.

Recommendations

ALA is calling for:

- effective partnerships and funding for nationwide adult learning projects that raise awareness of climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning
- governments and organisations to use adult and community education as a process to engage with the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Policy link

- UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015