

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **ADULT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION (ACE) - CALL TO ACTION**

We want to support the Australian Government to keep our adult and community education (ACE) sector alive so that it can continue to train, upskill and educate our communities, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and the newly unemployed. People with low level language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills will be most impacted at this time.

ACE is an important and recognisable sector of education that is not for profit and provides accessible lifelong and lifewide learning opportunities that are responsive to the education needs of adults 15 years and over.

More than 2,500 ACE providers are embedded in communities in urban, regional, rural and remote areas across Australia. They include neighbourhood houses, community colleges, community learning centres, Aboriginal learning cooperatives, community resources centres and more. These community-based organisations offer personal enrichment learning programs and many also offer adult basic education in language, literacy, numeracy, digital and other foundation skills. Others may also be registered training organisations (RTOs) delivering accredited vocational education training (VET).

The ACE sector can be part of the solution to help build community resilience and support the skills, capacity and capability of the nation. With government and community support, ACE will step up to the challenges and continue to make a difference in all our communities.

Across Australia, ACE providers have been forced to close or alter delivery of their adult education programs with dramatic consequences for employers, employees, and, not least, the learners. ACE has strong expertise working with disadvantaged, disengaged and older cohorts.

Unlike other education sectors, ACE provides a unique and vital frontline service by providing education and support to many Australians who are vulnerable and at risk. A significant number of ACE learners are also dealing with a range of issues including disability, low mental health and domestic violence. Many ACE learners are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, are second chance learners or on pathways to accredited learning but need wraparound support.

The 1 in 3 adult Australians that were already struggling to find and keep work because of low literacy and numeracy often found the support they need at ACE organisations. In the current climate with continued job losses, business closures and breakdown of systems, the number of more vulnerable people out of work and needing support will escalate. ACE can rise to the occasion, given the appropriate resources.

The sustainability of the ACE sector is clearly at risk and a rapid response is required to the COVID 19 crisis that is unfolding. We must work collaboratively and quickly to maintain the ACE sector which is a critical part of the fabric of our local communities. This requires

leadership from the Australian government to include ACE when developing responses and making decisions. We call on the Australian Government to work with us to enable the ACE sector to survive and thrive by:

1. Providing direct financial support to ensure the sustainability of the ACE sector
2. Funding professional development for the sector and their transition to online learning
3. Establishing a digital rebate scheme to maximise online capacity to enable immediate support for ACE providers and learning support agencies to increase capacity for flexible delivery of learning (i.e. purchase of equipment to sustain connectivity with laptops, tablets, ipads, including upgrades to software, satellite phones as a back-up in remote areas)
4. Providing VPN/online access capability to small agencies who have local/place-based networks and strong engagement with their learners
5. Resourcing the delivery of workplace orientated digital skills gap training that meets the needs of new environment and in preparation for post COVID 19
6. Resourcing the sector to prepare and provide opportunities to government staff, businesses and workers to embrace training, skills development and learning through ACE
7. Resourcing access to mental health programs for ACE educators on the frontline such as accidental counsellor training and peer support through Mentor Virtual Training Sessions and for them to deliver to their communities
8. Enabling flexible response for ACE providers to address contractual arrangements and reporting compliance for VET/AMEP/SEE programs
9. Ensuring support for adult learners with low levels of language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills by resourcing currently trained literacy tutors, ESL practitioners (volunteers and paid) across the country to contact learners online, use smartphone and printed resources designed to keep them learning
10. Providing top up funding to established state and territory initiatives for ACE providers to gear up support to out of work learners to re-skill and re-train

Adult Learning Australia is the national peak body for adult and community education with over 1,000 members representing all states and territories of Australia.

**Media contact:** Visit [www.ala.asn.au](http://www.ala.asn.au) or call 0488 030 073 for more information